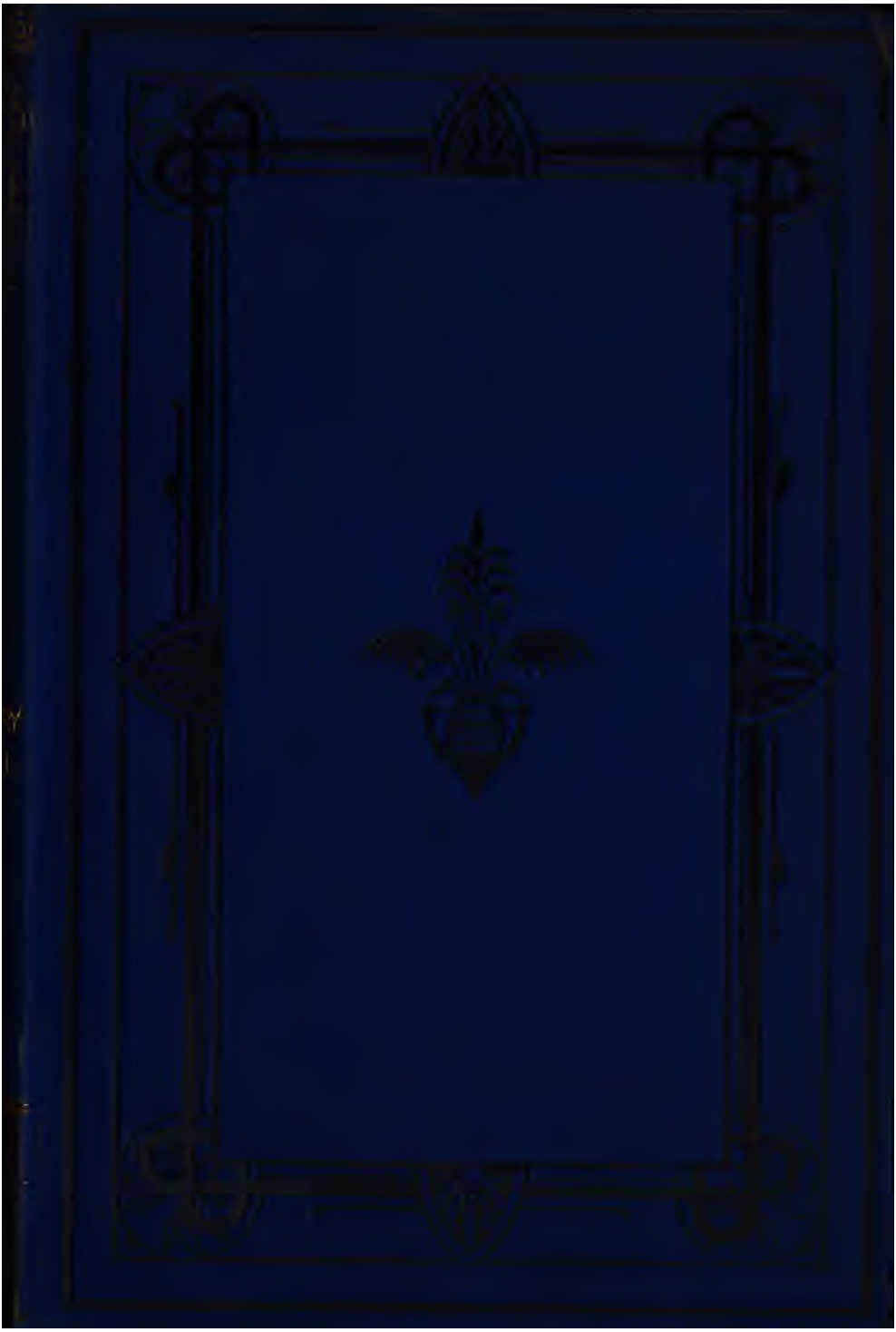

AMICO'S LITTLE GIRL.

A Novel.

BY

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AMICO'S LITTLE GIRL.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

TANTALISING.

EVERYONE knows with what mingled pleasure and regret, men of all nations look back upon their college days. Learned German professors retain as fond recollections of torch-light processions, huge tankards filled with foaming *lager bier*, and duels in which they disfigured the faces of students belonging to rival corps, as Englishmen do of wine-parties, cricket matches, and boating on Cam or Isis, in which they took part during the happy days of their life at the university. The manner of enjoyment may differ; but of course the delight with which all such reminiscences are fraught is owing to the marvellous capacity displayed by youths of all nations between the ages of eighteen and five-and-twenty for drinking in all this world has to offer in the way of pleasure.

We shall find no exception to this rule in Milton

Washington Corbin, a young American, who, as yet, had given no sign of following in the steps either of the immortal bard or the celebrated general after whom his parents had ambitiously named him. He had already spent a whole year at the University of Heidelberg, and had passed more time in making expeditions with kindred spirits to the many picturesque spots surrounding the town, and being initiated into all the customs of student life, than in acquiring the amount of learning that his father, a wealthy New York merchant, fondly expected. On the occasion on which we wish to introduce him to our reader he was lounging on a bench on the *anlagen* (or public walk), lazily tracing hieroglyphics with his cane on the gravel at his feet, and turning over in his mind whether or not to attend a lecture on philosophy which an eminent professor was to deliver that morning. It was on the plea of attending this course of instruction that young Corbin had received permission from his father to prolong his stay at Heidelberg; unfortunately, the lecture took place at an early hour, and Milton dearly loved getting up late; nor did he fancy the prospect of spending part of a summer's morning in a hot, crowded room. Once or twice he had made a desperate effort to rise in time, and even succeeded in starting for the University Square, when on each occasion some friends met and persuaded him to turn in another direction. At last he one day awoke to consciousness of the fact that the term was rapidly drawing to a close without his even knowing the great professor by sight. Conscience-stricken, he had determined to make one last attempt, and was on

his way to the abode of learning when a bench, shaded by horse-chestnut trees, looked so tempting in the oppressive July weather that he could not resist resting there for a few minutes to enjoy a cigarette. But for this delay, my story would never have been written.

"Wal now, Corbin, what are yer after at this matutinal hour?"

The speaker was a compatriot, but one our hero was by no means proud of; the man's dress, tone, manner, all were highly objectionable to his innate refinement of feeling.

A flashy tie, drawn through a large gold ring studded with garnets, a tall hat, poised on the back of his head and inclining somewhat towards the right ear, a blue frock-coat, and considerable display of embroidered shirt-front, bright yellow gloves, and a top-heavy looking walking-stick, with a carved ivory handle; these were amongst the most striking features of Mr. Twirl's dress. In short, his entire appearance presented what his countrymen call "a proclamation."

Every inch a Yankee, born and bred in a small New England town, the individual in question, on arriving at man's estate, seized the first opportunity of forsaking the house of the worthy deacon, his father, and seeking occupation and excitement among less strait-laced circles at Chicago. A fortunate speculation made him a wealthy man, and he resolved to visit Europe. His dress, as above described, was the united result of his Chicago tailor's advice and his own original taste.

"Wal, Corbin, I calc'late ye're in deep contemplation this morning. Don't yer hear me?"

It was no good seeking to appear deaf—Mr. Twirl would only have elevated his powerful organ of speech with additional force; Milton therefore slightly raised his hat with a polite "Good-morning, Mr. Twirl," being anxious to avoid appearing cordial. But the New Englander belonged to that provokingly good-humoured class of people who are quite irrepressible and will not take a hint. Mr. Twirl possessed many good qualities, it is true—was kind-hearted, obliging, and by no means ill-informed; yet there was, as we have already hinted, an impassable gulf fixed between himself and Milton, who, whatever his faults may have been, was undoubtedly a gentleman in the fullest sense of the word. It is needless to state that the other was not.

Milton did not lack that almost infallible indication of a refined mind, neatness and unostentation in dress. His simple, well-cut suit of dark blue serge, black tie, and snow-white linen formed as striking a contrast to the new-comer's showy attire, as did the shy blush on the youth's handsome face to the Yankee's* hail-fellow-well-met manner and the jovial look irradiating his irregular features.

The "Mr." and formal politeness were not observed by Mr. Twirl.

"What makes yer so early? There must be some rare game going on for yer to turn out at this time of

* Here it may perhaps not be out of place to remark that Americans for the most part emphatically declare the term "Yankee" to be alone rightfully applicable to those born in New England. In courtesy, therefore, I have only employed the term in that sense.

the morning: some fierce Suabian to chop up, or a beer-party at the *Kneipe?*" *

"No; the association I belong to does not fight, nor do we drink in the forenoon. I am off to a lecture, Mr. Twirl."

"Come now, that won't do. Yer won't catch me that fashion. Old birds, yer know——"

Milton's patience was nearly exhausted, and despite his shyness, a schoolboy impulse seized him to kick Mr. Twirl. He, however, wisely forbore. The semi-mediæval customs of a German university would require its customary foils to be exchanged for the far less pleasant American revolver, to wipe out the stain of such an insult. Yet what right had this fellow, whom he had hardly ever met before, to catechise him in this fashion?

"Indeed, I am going; and I think it is about time," said Milton, rising and looking at his watch; "good-morning."

"Wal now"—this was Mr. Twirl's favourite preface to all speeches—"what are yer in sich a hurry for? Wait a bit, and I'll come too."

This was indeed disagreeable, and Milton's patience might have succumbed, had not his eyes and thoughts been at that moment diverted into a totally different channel, namely, from the depths of vulgar prose to the heights of romance and poetry, towards which this shy, modest youth had a strong leaning.

Such a pink and white skin, together with blue-black locks and full blue eyes, could only belong to a daughter of Erin, he thought, as he watched a slight

* An association's place of meeting.

figure tripping along, carrying a basket piled with fruit and flowers.

"Come along, Piccolo. Come along, old fellow."

He envied the long-haired little dog, whose knowing brown eyes peeped out from beneath the overhanging ends of a coquettish pink bow. Piccolo's mistress had evidently just returned from the market, where the roses always fascinated new-comers, to whom indeed the whole scene was a pleasing novelty.

Our hero's capacity was great for noticing and knowing the name of every pretty girl in the place. I fear his eyes "travelled round," as he would have expressed it, more than once on Sundays, during the performance of divine service at the little English church. But as yet they had never come across this fair vision of beauty; he therefore concluded that she must be a new arrival.

Again the very nasal tones of Mr. Twirl's harsh voice roused the young man from his musings.

The customary "wal" was this time changed to a protracted "My, if that is yer professor, I calc'late I'll go in for the same course of study."

This was too much for the lad's endurance. Once more raising his hat with a good-morning abruptly uttered, he hurried off at rapid strides, leaving the astonished Twirl to wonder complacently what he was "in such a deuce of a hurry for." Unfortunately, in his anxiety to escape from his tormentor, he had not noticed the direction taken by the charming apparition; and let his eyes "travel round" as he would, he could not catch another glimpse of her.

The learned professor and his abstruse reasonings

were totally forgotten by the susceptible youth, who spent the remainder of the day in pacing up and down the *anlagen*, vainly hoping to meet once more with the enchanting vision.

This gratification was, however, to be denied him for the present.

CHAPTER II.

A GLEAM OF HOPE.

NOTHING could Milton ascertain concerning the girl whose blue eyes, peeping from amidst a pyramid of roses, had fascinated him so greatly. Vainly he haunted the *anlagen* and castle grounds, and even rose at unheard-of hours, and astonished old peasant women by stumbling over their baskets whilst peering round the market. Either the fair unknown was proof against the attractions of promenades, bands, and flowers, or—horrible thought—picturesque Heidelberg knew her no more. He went so far as to struggle against his natural shyness and appear at a *réunion* at the Museum, where German students (in attire which would cause a London tailor to faint) energetically performed the hop-valse, though the thermometer was at 80° in the shade. Young ladies of all nations were present; but that graceful little figure with the dark falling locks was not discernible amidst the clouds of white muslin. In his despair Milton daily visited every *café* in the town, and persistently studied each newspaper that possessed a strangers' list, eagerly noting down every Irish name

he came across; for one glance at the dark hair and deep-blue eyes had satisfied him as to the young lady's nationality. On one such occasion he suddenly found himself face to face with the uncongenial Twirl. Without being absolutely rude, he could not avoid a meeting, so submitted with the best possible grace. Mr. Twirl suggested a game of euchre, to which he consented; but not even the possession of the right bower, nor the certainty of crushing all his adversary's hopes, could hinder his eyes from occasionally wandering across to a small table, at which a portly old gentleman was leisurely conning the local journal. At length said personage pushed back his chair, and young Corbin made a hopeless blunder, which euchred him.

"Wal, Corbin, one would think that old party was yer little professor, yer making sich eyes at him."

The worthy old German walked away, and Milton immediately sent the waiter for the desired newspaper; Twirl's insinuation he ignored, only began to give his whole attention to the game from the moment the journal was placed beside him. Still he felt relieved when Mr. Twirl remarked:

"I calc'late I've played enough."

Whilst his compatriot engaged in a vehement discussion with a fresh-comer on the advisability of women being jurors, Milton carefully perused the list of visitors. He devoutly hoped the irrepressible Twirl would continue his contest on behalf of the fair sex, and not turn his inquiring mind and all-discerning gaze towards him. For he felt "perfectly transparent" in the presence of those twinkling grey eyes. If Twirl knew how often he had taken notes of likely sounding names, and what

adventures had ensued, he would treasure the account of them as "such a good story," to be brought up on every possible occasion. How he would laugh, especially at the dilemma our young friend had got into with an irascible aged dame who gloried in the name of Miss Patricia O'Hara.

Reading that a lady owning this high-sounding appellation was staying at the principal hotel in the place, he had made many inquiries, but had not been fortunate enough to meet with anyone who was acquainted with her, till one day when captured by a designing mother who had two marriageable daughters, and did not object to procuring a rich American for a son-in-law. On this occasion he had been compelled to spend more than two hours on a bench in the castle-gardens, flanked on either side by a red-cheeked, flaxen-haired young lady, who bore, by reason of her solidity, a strong resemblance to a Dutch doll. In course of conversation, one of these stolid damsels pointed out an old gentleman as Mr. O'Hara, who was staying at the Hotel Victoria.

"Is there also a Miss O'Hara here?" eagerly inquired Milton.

"Oh yes; a disagreeable old creature," came from both sisters' lips at once.

Now the lad had remarked that his fair captors never became animated except when the conversation turned on other young ladies. At such times they set to work with surprising energy to describe the unfortunate person's sins and defects, duly supported by the harsh, grating voice of their mother. He therefore somewhat too hastily concluded that said "disagreeable creature"

could be no other than the "fair unknown," another victim of the Dutch dolls' unsparing tongues. Old and young, pretty and plain, corpulent and scraggy daughters of the Emerald Isle he had seen. Miss O'Hara was the only Irish lady in Heidelberg whom he had not identified. Surely she must be the object of his researches.

When very shy people come to a sudden determination, they are sometimes capable of things from which the unreserved would shrink. All their courage seems concentrated into one bold stroke, and this was now the case with Milton. The modest, retiring youth, who never spoke to a fellow-creature without blushing, made up his mind he would bear this terrible suspense no longer, and set off the following morning on a voyage of discovery to the Hotel Victoria. Though having no very definite purpose in view, he would ask for Miss O'Hara, and the reception he met with should decide as to further steps. The result was as follows.

In reply to Mr. Corbin's inquiry, the head-waiter suavely replied: "Mees O'Hara is to house," and forthwith ordered another attendant to usher the gentleman into her private *salon*. The door closed behind him, and Milton found himself in a room filled with bird-cages. Two parrots screeched at him from either end of the room: "Ha, ha! Here's a row! *Ja wohl, ja wohl.*" A black-and-tan terrier rushed out from beneath the table, barking snappishly. The youth's shyness began to return. The noise overwhelmed him. Such things must not be if Patricia became his wife. A suspicion even crossed his mind—oh! horror!—that

perhaps after all these were not his fair one's apartments!

"And pray, what may be your business, young man?"

This decidedly unpleasant question was asked in no reassuring tone. The speaker was a fierce-looking old lady, with stiff grey ringlets and an alarming expression about her mouth.

"I beg your pardon, madam. I thought, h'm—that is to say, I fancied——"

Here Milton paused, not knowing how to explain matters. He certainly could not fall at her feet in rapturous devotion, as he had for a moment wildly imagined he might, if his "dear Patricia" seemed at all disposed to grant him a hearing.

"Oh, I know very well what you want. A begging trick, I see. Come with some story about having lost your money or your railway-ticket; really hoping to find something to put into your pocket."

Certainly, Miss O'Hara was not very discriminating. Blushing, well-dressed, gentleman-like Milton Corbin, looked neither like a thief nor an impostor. But then a swindler had called a short time before, with some piteous story, and gone off with a couple of sovereigns which his tale had extracted from her, and, into the bargain, taken her favourite travelling-cloak, which she certainly had not given him. Milton, anxious to disabuse her of the notion she had formed of him, again attempted a gentle remonstrance.

"Really, madam, I fancied you were a lady I had once had the pleasure of seeing."

It was of no use; Miss O'Hara did not, or would not,

›r letting strange people into her drawing-room, told ›ie story with great delight to that "funny little ›merican," Mr. Twirl, who was her neighbour at the *ıble d'hôte*, describing in glowing colours her heroism ›n the occasion.

As to the hero of the story, Twirl had his own susicions on the subject. Whilst enjoying a cigarette at ›ie window, he had seen Milton enter the hotel, and 'kewise witnessed his hasty exit; he was also cognizant f the fact that Miss O'Hara—otherwise not at all a 'isagreeable old lady—thought the Continent abounded ›n swindlers and robbers. So he drew his own concluions.

Unlike Milton, his eyes had been allowed a second .limpse of the fair unknown, and, strange to say, she was, on this last occasion, coming out of Miss O'Hara's .itting-room. He therefore supposed her to be in ome way connected with that stately personage, ınd did not doubt but that Milton was aware of his.

The political discussion came to a termination, for Mr. Twirl's adversary had an appointment to keep, and was therefore compelled to leave in the midst of a graphic description of the confusion it would create in court, if a materfamilias were to appear on jury duty with a clamorous infant, too young to be left behind.

Mr. Twirl was therefore free once more to turn his undivided attention to our young friend, and make use of the earliest opportunity for satisfying the curiosity, which was one of his most largely developed characteristics, as to how far Milton's acquaintance with the pretty little Irish girl had progressed, and what the

reason was of his summary ejection from Miss Patricia O'Hara's drawing-room.

"Wal, Corbin, how is yer professoress? Made much progress in yer studies lately—eh, my boy?"

"I don't understand."

"Come, now, none o' that. Don't yer try that on. Ain't yer sailing with a fair wind?"

"I suppose you must be referring to the morning on which we met on the *anlagen?*"

"Why, of course I am; and to that pretty little Irish gal. By-the-way, didn't yer have an unpleasant encounter with that old party, her aunt?"

The "aunt" was merely said for the purpose of bringing in Milton's encounter at the hotel, Mr. Twirl not being aware whether the two ladies were related or not.

"Her aunt?" asked Milton, falling into the snare.

"Why yes; Miss Patricia O'Hara."

"And pray, how do you know that the young lady is Miss O'Hara's niece?"

Milton felt that by his manner, at least, he had betrayed more interest than he wished. Those keen grey eyes could read him through; they must have found out his secret. Should he make a clean breast of it, and tell Twirl everything? He was a very good-natured man, and evidently knew something about the little enchantress, so might be of use. Milton thought nothing could be worse than this protracted suspense. He did not care for girls, as a rule; he did not flirt. Whether or not this fair vision made such an impression on him, because she appeared just as he was writhing under the vulgar jocosity of this very Mr.

Twirl, he could not tell; he was only certain that if, as some maintain, the world is created in pairs, and each going forth singly, some fortunate ones meet the other half destined for them, then he had seen the half with which he felt he could form a harmonious whole. Should it only be seen to be lost to sight again for ever?

The boy (he was scarcely more) did not know how many men meet with such sorrows, and—outlive them. At the age of twenty it is hard to realise how matter-of-fact we shall have become in another score of years.

"Wal, happening to have the pleasure of being tolerably well acquainted with Miss O'Hara, I have reason to imagine I am not mistaken as to the young lady being her niece," resumed Mr. Twirl, with a certain show of dignity.

"Know Miss O'Hara?" exclaimed Milton, now thrown entirely off his guard as the delightful prospect of at last being put on the right track suggested itself to his excited mind. "Know her? I wish I did—but no, that is impossible."

"Nonsense, my good fellow; the fact of her having taken yer for a highwayman will not matter. I calc'late it will raise yer in her estimation. She is a queer customer, but not ill-natured; only a bit afraid of brigands. Come, I'll introduce yer. Now, I call that a real handsome offer."

Milton was utterly bewildered. It was no use being reticent any longer. Nothing escaped this terrible man's notice. What a splendid detective he would make, or an emissary of the Grand Inquisition! He half wished Twirl had lived two centuries earlier, and

distinguished himself in some such manner, instead of being occupied with inquiring into *his* private affairs. And yet the opportunity for finding out something about the lovely Irish girl was too tempting to refuse.

"Indeed, the little girl was very pretty. I should not mind making her acquaintance."

He thought he had succeeded admirably in assuming a tone of supreme indifference. The "highwayman" question he prudently avoided altogether. Still, it was undoubtedly humiliating to be introduced under Twirl's patronage to a lady who had ordered the waiter to turn him out of the house when he called on his own account.

In our imagination we often picture to ourselves all kinds of seemingly insurmountable difficulties, which time proves to be entirely the creatures of our fancy. And so Milton found. Three days earlier he would have laughed at the notion of being graciously received in Miss Patricia O'Hara's drawing-room and pronounced by that alarming personage to be a "very nice young man." Yet so it was; Mr. Twirl having diplomatically introduced the subject at the *table d'hôte* on the day succeeding his interview with Milton at the *café*, and wisely choosing the moment when the old lady was in high good humour at the prospect of her favourite dish, *fricandeau à l'oiseille*. How she could have been so silly as to take "that very gentleman-like Mr. Corbin" for an impostor, Miss Patricia never could make out, and frequently apologised to him for the mistake. She begged he would call as often as he liked, as a sign of forgiveness.

CHAPTER III.

A MEETING.

MILTON'S acquaintance with Miss Patricia O'Hara increased rapidly; not so, however, his knowledge concerning the fair unknown. He never had the good fortune of meeting her in his visits to the Hotel Victoria, although he very frequently called there in hopes of doing so. Miss O'Hara did not mention her niece, nor did he find an opportunity of introducing the subject.

At length he almost doubted the existence of the relationship, and began to think himself the victim of one of Mr. Twirl's practical jokes; yet pride and shyness would not at first permit him to inquire of that worthy the reason why the young lady did not appear. Ten, twelve days, a whole fortnight passed, and the anxious youth had pushed his investigations no further; finally, he determined to call on the man and attempt to draw him out.

On inquiring at the hotel he learnt that Mr. Twirl had gone away, and would certainly not be back for three weeks, probably longer.

Milton felt very vexed; he had never imagined that the absence of that obtrusive person could make so much difference to him. The term would end in ten days; after that, he would be obliged to join his father at Paris: the old gentleman was not easy to deal with, and considered himself a model parent for

crossing the Atlantic to see his son; his wishes must, therefore, be complied with unhesitatingly.

After receiving the news of Mr. Twirl's abrupt departure, the lad lit a cigar and sauntered down to the banks of the Neckar to kill time and brood over his hopeless longings. There was a slight breeze, which made the air feel cool and pleasant. The paddle of a small canoe, in which he sometimes made excursions on the river, lay temptingly ready, and he thought a fight with the current, which was very strong by the old bridge, would be a slight diversion for his perplexed mind.

Throwing away his cigar, he pushed off the canoe, and jumped in. Swiftly and cleverly handling the paddle, he deftly shot the bridge; then proceeded more leisurely, the breeze softly fanning his cheek, past the ancient gate of the town, with the stately ruins of the Electorate castle towering above it; past the Stift Neuburg, where daughters of poor nobles with long pedigrees had formerly led the conventual life, till he reached a fishing-village, nestling at the foot of a hill, on the summit of which traces of a robber-knight's stronghold were visible. Here he halted, made fast his canoe, and stepped ashore. Once more he had recourse to one of the most valued comforts men possess—a good cigar; then, scarcely heeding the direction, slowly began to ascend a woodland path, leading towards the robber-knight's tower.

A clearance amongst the trees at the first turning displayed a farmhouse. In front some hens strolled about, cackling and looking important, and a child, with a merry little mud-besmeared face, laughed

heartily at its own successful attempts to splash the water contained in a low stone trough both over its own small person and the linen which its mother had spread on the grass to dry. As Milton approached, the irate parent had just discovered what occupation her hopeful son was engaged in, and appeared in the doorway to summon him to judgment.

It was a pleasant spot, and Milton gladly availed himself of the seat which a piece of moss-grown rock afforded, and gave himself up entirely to the enjoyment of his cigar. The valley at his feet, the green waters of the Neckar, in which the surrounding hills and small white cottages dotted here and there were so clearly reflected; the blue smoke issuing from the chimneys of the fishing-village where he had landed; rope-makers plying their craft on the bank, and mischievous urchins paddling in the water, all made a pleasant, peaceful picture.

He began to wonder if the youths and maidens of those parts ever gazed on this scene with aching hearts. Surely, the course of their rustic courtships must always run smooth, and Hans need never wander about the country in search of some beauty whose image once seen could not be effaced from his soul. Probably he engaged himself at the village *kirchweih** to some yellow-haired Gretchen, whom he had known from childhood, having dragged her on his little sledge to school in winter, and paddled with her in summer like those happy children yonder.

Experience had not yet taught Milton the univer-

* The annual *fête*.

sality and truth of the wise man's words, which tell how each heart alone "knoweth its own bitterness."

There was a rustling amongst the leaves of the low brushwood at the back of the farmhouse, and then the shrill bark of a small dog. "Bow, wow, wow," answered a deeper voice. Milton raised his eyes and beheld a large watch-dog in the act of pouncing on a very diminutive specimen of the canine race.

Milton possessed a large share of that innate chivalry common to all classes of his countrymen, which cannot bear to see the weak suffer pain or oppression of any kind without seeking to rescue them; therefore it did not require a moment's reflection for him to jump up with the intention of driving off the big dog. Having no stick, he began the attack by discharging a tolerably large stone at the enemy, and succeeded beyond his expectations. The missile hit the animal near the eyes, and, letting go its victim, it slunk away to its kennel with a dismal howl.

Milton ran forward and picked up the little dog. The poor creature had had a narrow escape, thanks to timely interference and its own long hair. It appeared half-dead with fright, only now and then heaving a scarcely audible breath; but closer examination proved it not to be seriously hurt, the skin of the neck being scarcely grazed.

What was that lying on the ground? A torn pink riband. Surely, then, this must be Piccolo; he would not for a moment allow himself to think that another Maltese terrier existed which a fond mistress adorned thus.

"Piccolo! Oh, you naughty, naughty Piccolo! What has become of you?"

Could he be mistaken? No, it was no delusion; no mocking wood-sprite made the silver notes of that never-to-be-forgotten voice ring in his ears. There, at the edge of the wood, stood the sought-after enchantress, looking much as she had on that first morning when returning with her picturesque burden from the market. Now again she was laden with flowers, gathered this time fresh from the woods, and her wide-brimmed hat was ornamented with ferns and grasses. In one hand she carried a basket filled with bilberries, in the other a huge posy.

Milton was kneeling on the ground with Piccolo in his arms. Scarcely did the young girl perceive that her little favourite lay motionless, and quite irresponsive to her call, in the hands of a stranger, than she threw down her flowers, let the carefully collected basket of bilberries roll unheeded down the pathway, and ran, anxious and breathless, to inquire what had happened.

"I guess your little dog was in danger of being eaten up."

Young Corbin always used Americanisms when feeling particularly shy, and was now duly displeased with himself for having done so. How very different were the many speeches he had rehearsed, over and over again to himself, as he mentally anticipated the blissful moment when they should meet! Was he not to have prepared the way by some well-considered phrase for an avowal of his love? Now he certainly was on his knees before her, but, in his detestable

bashfulness, had blurted out a speech worthy of that odious Twirl.

The moment was not favourable for the realisation of his hopes; perhaps his ill-timed bluntness had ruined his chances irreparably. What would she think of his breaking the news of Piccolo's accident so roughly to her? And, above all, what had possessed him to let slip that dreadful "I guess," which he had learned to avoid since his arrival in Europe?

Fortunately the young lady heeded it very little—in fact, almost ignored him; except that, shaking her gracefully-shaped head, whilst two big tears rolled down her cheeks, she said sorrowfully:

"My poor wee doggie!" Then added: "How did it happen?"

His equanimity being in some degree restored, Milton managed, blushingly, to explain the circumstances, ending by repeatedly assuring the young girl that her dog was more frightened than hurt, which the little creature confirmed by opening its sagacious brown eyes and attempting to lick the hand which its fond mistress held out to it. Milton thought he had never seen such a prettily-dimpled hand before, and the dark purple stains of the bilberries merely served to enhance its whiteness.

The blue eyes brightened when their owner saw that the dog was recovering.

"My father is sketching up at the old tower," she said, "so I strolled off in search of flowers and bilberries. Piccolo was soon tired of following, and a bird or stoat rustling amongst the leaves, tempted him to hunt. I heard a bark unlike his, so ran down

as fast as I could, to see what had become of him."

Milton blessed the fate which had caused this chain of circumstances.

"I think" (this time he carefully avoided saying "guess") "your little dog will soon be able to run again; but maybe I had better carry him for you." He felt very reluctant to break off this long-desired acquaintanceship at so early a stage.

"Oh, thank you. But, you see, he knows me best, and will feel more at home in my arms. I would rather carry him myself, if you don't mind."

"Certainly."

Milton could not, however, let his bright hopes fade away without one more effort.

"If you will allow me, I will bring you your basket." And forthwith he set off down the hill to find the neglected article. A friendly root had hindered its downfall, but most of the bilberries were scattered in the dust. The flowers lay on the bank at the edge of the wood. These treasures in hand, he returned to his new acquaintance's side. "May I be permitted to reconduct you to your father? I should be so glad to watch the progress in Piccolo's condition."

He imagined this to be the height of diplomacy.

"I scarcely like to trouble you; but I don't think I can quite manage to carry my dog, the basket—and the flowers."

She dwelt on the enumeration of each burden in a way highly delightful to Milton.

Thus unexpectedly was the meeting brought about

which he had striven so continuously for; and the pair set off together towards the robber-knight's tower.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ARTIST'S STORY.

In the summer of 1831, Vincent Hardwicke, a young painter of great promise, made a tour through Ireland to procure subjects for his brush. On one occasion his occupations rendered it necessary for him to stop at an extremely out-of-the-way village on the Western coast. Ballygoran offered the poorest apology for accommodation that it is possible to imagine, so that Hardwicke, though thoroughly accustomed to rough it, by no means relished the notion of sojourning there. Having completed some studies of sea-pieces, he felt tempted to shoulder his knapsack and depart; but, returning one day from the shore, he stumbled among some rocks and sprained his ankle. A few days before he had steadfastly declined an invitation, given with true Irish hospitality, by Mr. O'Hara, a neighbouring landowner. Hearing, however, of the accident, that gentleman appeared, on the following morning, at the door of the mud-cabin in which Hardwicke lodged, and carried him off, without further arguments, to his own house, declaring that the artist's plea of wishing to be near his work was no longer valid in his invalided condition. "And so, my boy, you had better make the best of your bad luck." This Hardwicke did not find difficult,

especially as his host possessed four daughters, who proved very pleasant gaolers.

What was the result? One by no means uncommon. He fell in love with Constance, the youngest, a pretty little girl of seventeen. She was her father's darling, and he could refuse her nothing; so when she went and sat on his knee, and, nestling close up to him, told how she never could, should, or would, ever care for anyone but Vincent Hardwicke, he swore a round oath —indeed, more than one—at the notion of an O'Hara marrying anyone not descended from the kings of Ireland; vowed he would never give a daughter of his to a strolling vagabond of an Englishman, and—ended by consenting to their union.

As long as her father lived, Constance remained ignorant of the hardships of poverty, for each Christmas and birthday brought her cheques for very considerable sums from her loving parent. It was most fortunate that he was so liberal, for her husband did not make as rapid steps on the road to fame as she had fondly hoped. This proceeded partly from lack of perseverance, partly from his not possessing a rich patron to lend him a helping hand, and render his works fashionable.

Ere many years passed, Mr. O'Hara was gathered to his fathers. His son Michael, and eldest daughter Patricia, both of whom had never forgiven their sister's *mésalliance*, persuaded him, when the approach of death had enfeebled his powers, to make a will leaving all the unentailed property to be divided amongst those of his children who still owned the good old name. The two other daughters soon followed their

father to the grave; Patricia, therefore, and her brother Michael, were rich in this world's goods, and they allowed the intimacy with their less fortunate sister to cool considerably. This was no difficult matter, as, finding he did not get on satisfactorily in London, Hardwicke went abroad with his wife, and wandered all over Europe.

Want of success in his early days did not sweeten the artist's disposition. He grew sullen and discontented, and his poor wife had to bear the brunt of his ill-humour.

After twelve years of matrimony, which by no means resembled the golden dream of her happy youth, Constance died at Florence.

The widower did not alter his mode of life. He sent his only little daughter, Elsie, to school in England till she was sixteen, when she rejoined him on the Continent, and henceforth became his constant companion. Hardwicke was a man of undoubted talent, and of late had been far more successful in his profession; therefore, though living somewhat from hand to mouth, was able to supply himself and his daughter with everything requisite for people of moderate wants. Increase of fortune had in some degree improved his temper, so that Elsie was generally happy in his society.

Vincent Hardwicke was not bad, but weak principled, hating everything which gave him mental trouble; he was, therefore, not likely to teach his child a very high standard of thought. This, however, had been supplied to Elsie in her school-life; the head of the establishment at which she was educated happened to be a woman of great cultivation and con-

scientiousness. Fortunately, too, poor Constance's amiability and light-heartedness descended to her daughter. It was her only inheritance.

Unfettered by the cares of poverty and the demands and restraints of fashion, Elsie led a life of happy freedom, and thoroughly enjoyed the continual novelty and beauty she met with in her travels. She and her father, at the time my story began, had for some weeks been staying in the vicinity of Heidelberg. They rented a suite of furnished rooms in a small house on the banks of the Neckar, and were continually exploring the country for fresh subjects for Hardwicke to paint.

One day Elsie, on returning to their lodgings, found a card bearing the name of Miss Patricia O'Hara. Her father had frequently told her about her aunt Patty, and though his account was not very favourable, Elsie nevertheless felt much disposed to return the visit; she had an innate, unreasoning love for her Irish relations.

The very next day she begged her father to go with her to the Hotel Victoria, to which he at length grumblingly consented.

Miss Patricia O'Hara had, as we know, been very wrath at her little sister Constance (who was twenty years her junior) having demeaned herself by marrying a struggling artist. Had she met her surrounded by half-a-dozen overgrown, hungry children, she might have sent her some assistance, as she would to any other pauper, but most undoubtedly would not have called on her. Now, however, the case was different. Poor Constance, having no doubt lived to repent of her folly, was lying in a foreign grave, and Miss Patricia's

piety forbade her to speak evil of the dead. If she had been a little hard to the mother, which, however, was only in accordance with her duty to the family dignity, the opportunity now offered to make up for it by kindness to the child. Before coming to this virtuous conclusion, Miss Patricia O'Hara, who was making a stay on the Continent for the benefit of her health, had taken care to make full inquiries concerning "an artist, whose name, I believe, is Hardwicke;" in answer to which investigations she had been told that his sketches were rather the fashion; that he had a daughter ("quite a lady," her informant condescendingly remarked), and that the painter was just then staying at Heidelberg.

Now Miss Patricia was by no means averse to having either a fashionable artist or a pretty, presentable young lady to patronise, and thus the meeting came about.

Vincent Hardwicke was astonished to see the "Patty" of former days transformed into such a prim and particular old lady. Miss Patricia, on her part, was somewhat unpleasantly surprised at being carelessly greeted as "Patty," and finding the painter in nowise a good subject for patronage. Her niece suited her better; it was true she was not quite as opinionless and subdued as would have suited her aunt, but she was unmistakably pretty, and very ready to bear with the old lady's crotchets.

Vincent Hardwicke did not press the intimacy after the first visit: indeed, never called again himself, as his brother-in-law, Michael O'Hara, who was travelling with Patricia, had not given him a reception at all

approaching to cordiality. Feeling, however, that in case of his decease Elsie, to whom he had nothing to leave, had only these relatives to look to in all the wide world, he let his daughter visit them whenever she felt disposed. The irresistible sunshine of her nature might not improbably win her a place in the heart of his old sister-in-law, who was full of prejudices and pride of birth, but by no means unimpressionable. No; hard-hearted Patty could on rare occasions be most inconsistently soft-hearted.

* * * * * *

Elsie truly rose with the lark, and on the morning on which Milton Corbin first saw her had started off soon after six o'clock to be in time for the first choice of fruit and flowers at the market. She had called on the way to inquire for her aunt, and in her simplicity was greatly astonished to be told by a sleepy-looking "boots" that "Mees O'Hara" would probably not rise for more than two hours. It was when returning home with her spoils that Milton had seen her. Not many days afterwards she and her father set out on a tour, and had only returned on the evening preceding the occasion on which the youth had the gratification of meeting her.

CHAPTER V.

NOT WITHOUT A RIVAL.

AMONGST the visitors staying at the Hotel Victoria was a certain Mr. Slaney Claughton, whose reputation of

being heir to a large fortune made him sought out by designing mothers, whilst his good looks and talent for making himself agreeable rendered him equally attractive to their daughters.

Slaney's father was a stock-broker. He belonged to a good old D——shire family; but being the second son (his elder brother inherited a heavily-mortgaged estate), had found it necessary to carve out his own fortunes in the City, and, thanks to indomitable perseverance, his business efforts were very successful. Slaney was his only child, whom it was his chief ambition to see well married. By this the stock-broker meant that his future daughter-in-law should be of high birth; the riches he was able and willing to supply, but was determined that in his son the ancient position of the family should be restored. On all other points he was the most indulgent of fathers, and every whim of Slaney's was unhesitatingly gratified.

That young man's latest fancy being to see something of the life of a German university, a courier had been engaged to pioneer the precious youth through the difficulties and possible perils of Continental travel.

Miss Patricia O'Hara had formerly been slightly acquainted with Slaney's mother, and eagerly embraced the opportunity of "lionising" the handsome young Englishman. Since making acquaintance with her sister Constance's daughter, the idea had entered her head that it was very desirable for men to marry young. By arranging a marriage between Elsie and Slaney Claughton, her conscience would be free from any debt which its susceptibility might fancy to be owing to her late sister's memory.

Could it be possible that Patricia O'Hara, that stern, uncompromising spinster, whose heart had been proof against all offers of matrimony, was no less a matchmaker than the rest of her sex? Oh, womanly inconsistency, fie on thee—fie on thee!

On the evening of her return, Elise had written a little note to her aunt to acquaint her with the fact. The good lady rejoiced in heart, and forthwith replied by a gracious invitation to dinner. Her brother harangued her on the inadvisability of increasing her intimacy with "those Hardwickes;" upon which the irate spinster told "Mike" not to be a fool, but to leave her to manage her own affairs. After this speech old Michael relapsed into his customary state of sullen taciturnity.

Elsie thought Aunt Patricia must be in a remarkably amiable mood to invite her to dinner, and being fond of a novelty, gladly accepted for the day following the one on which her father had arranged to sketch the old ruin of the robber-knight's stronghold. Miss Patricia on her part completed her arrangements by inviting Mr. Slaney Claughton to coffee, after dinner, in her *salon*.

The knowledge of these facts would not have contributed to the increase of Milton's happiness; but fortunately for his peace of mind, he was in blissful ignorance of them, and mentally built many delightful castles in the air, as he walked up the hill, privileged to carry Elsie's basket.

Piccolo gradually recovered from his alarm, and his mistress, her fears assuaged, was free to express her thanks to her little favourite's deliverer.

"You did me a great kindness in saving Piccolo's life. I am so fond of my doggie. Thank you so much."

How these few words touched the youth's heart, and how happy he felt to have been of service to her! Once more he envied Piccolo's share in his mistress's regard; but hoped his own acquaintance, begun under such favourable auspices, might yet ripen into something better and deeper. Blushing, he stammered a "Please, do not mention it;" racked his brains for something else to say, and at length fell behind hopelessly silent.

Elsie walked on carefully before him, carrying the convalescent Piccolo; and, thinking her companion disliked thanks, changed the subject by venturing a few remarks on the beauty of the scenery.

How short the distance seemed to Milton! He longed to say something to introduce the subject nearest his heart; but anything approaching a declaration of love on so short an acquaintance would be nothing short of ludicrous; besides, his enchantress was so merry, natural, and totally unromantic, that he felt she would not understand him; probably, she was not aware that he had ever set eyes on her before. And yet so excellent an opportunity might never occur again; her father might be an old dragon, who watched over her like the mythical dog who kept the gates of Hades.

Whilst his mind was in this state of indecision, his companion cut short his cogitations by saying:

"Here is the ruin, and there is papa."

Milton for the first time turned his eyes from

watching the graceful movements of Elsie's slight figure to the contemplation of the scene before him. Seated on a campstool beneath a ruined tower he beheld a broad-shouldered man, wearing a Tyrolese hat, whose head was bent over a sketching-block, though his hand held a pipe instead of a brush.

Vincent Hardwicke was making mental studies; at the sound of footsteps he slightly raised his head:

"Elsie."

"Yes, papa."

"Where have you been all this while?"

Mr. Hardwicke's tone was gruff; sometimes he did not speak for hours together—then Elsie was free to roam where she pleased; at other times he would take it into his head to ask her opinion about some art question, about which his mind was really already made up—he would then feel injured if she happened to have gone off on a ramble.

"Oh, papa, poor Piccolo has been nearly killed, and this gentleman——"

The last words made the painter turn his head completely round, giving Milton an opportunity of noticing his peaked brown beard and bronzed healthy looking face.

Hardwicke treated the young man to a glance of surprised scrutiny, not exactly expressive of pleasure at his arrival; then, having indulged in a prolonged stare, as if moved by a sudden inspiration, he slightly raised his hat. This reception could not impress the young American with a very favourable idea of British courtesy; certainly the artist's manners were not polished.

Elsie, who was never at a loss, quickly told the story of Piccolo's encounter to her father, who was almost always good-tempered with her, though his rough manner towards others frequently distressed her.

"Well, you were a little fool to run off, and did not deserve to meet with a knight-errant ready to fight for Piccolo;" after which blunt speech the painter's good-humour slowly returned, and though he did not have the civility to thank Piccolo's rescuer in so many words, he did what he thought was equivalent: asked the young American to sit down and share their picnic repast.

This time Milton's shyness stood him in good stead, for it made him shrink from refusing this gruff man's invitation, and accordingly he remained.

"My name is Hardwicke; I am an artist by profession. Will you oblige me by telling me to whom I am——"

"I am an American, sir. My name is Milton Corbin."

Hardwicke felt relieved at having his speech cut short, being rather at a loss how to end it. He liked Americans, and Corbin's retiring manner pleased him; all things, therefore, combined to make him look more favourably on the young stranger than he had at first done.

Milton helped Elsie to unpack the provision-basket, and the repast went off most successfully. Mr. Hardwicke declared his readiness to show the young man his latest pictures, if he would call at his lodgings on the Neckar; altogether, Milton felt supremely happy,

and almost convinced that the good time would undoubtedly come when he might declare his love and be accepted. So weighty an interpretation did his heart give to the careless invitation of the artist, and the bright smiles of his daughter. Foolish lad!—were he less ready to build castles in the air, many a pang would be spared him.

The conversation turned on Heidelberg; Milton introduced Miss O'Hara's name, which caused the painter to frown and stroke his beard savagely; but Elsie said, unhesitatingly:

"Oh yes, she is my aunt; do you know her?" and was seemingly gratified to hear he did.

Milton understood now, without any explanation from Mr. Twirl, that the reason of his waiting so long in vain to see Elsie at Miss O'Hara's was owing, first to her having been away, and then to her father's apparently caring very little for his relatives. Miss O'Hara's silence concerning her niece he attributed to the proud old lady not liking to own that a sister of hers had married a painter. He inwardly determined to call on her next day, and see if he could not induce her to install Elsie as first favourite; for surely she was preferable to a snarling dog and screeching parrots, or even old Mike.

Elsie, actively helped by Milton, repacked the basket, and then all three started off together towards the river. Piccolo condescended to walk, though not displaying his usual friskiness.

The Hardwickes had left their boat at the village where Milton's canoe was; they could therefore return to Heidelberg together.

"Come, now, young man," said the lazy artist, "your arms are younger than mine; what do you say to lending me your canoe, and rowing my daughter back in our boat? I dare say you will not mind, though it is a regular German one, uncommonly clumsy and heavy."

This unceremonious request was readily acceded to by Milton, and the painter started off in the canoe. In the first years after his wife's death, whilst Elsie was at school in England, he had frequently made expeditions in that manner, and therefore surprised his new friend by the dexterity he displayed in managing the paddle.

Elsie stepped lightly into the boat; Milton followed, seized the oars, and they shot swiftly after the canoe.

The moon had by this time risen, and cast its silvery light on the water. Milton asked Elsie if she could sing; assenting, she raised her sweet voice and enchanted the oarsman by one of the many pretty songs she had learnt in Italy.

CHAPTER VI.

WHO WILL WIN?

On the morning following the events recorded in the last chapter, Milton Corbin awoke with a general feeling of pleasant recollections and agreeable anticipations; when, after sundry stretchings and yawnings, he could prevail on himself to leave his bed, various memories of the preceding evening began to assume a

more definite shape in his sleepy brain. It was strange, he thought, that what he had so fruitlessly striven for should have come about so unexpectedly. What a winsome, beautiful girl Elsie was! yet so simple and childlike, that he feared she would not understand the strength of his lovê, or be otherwise than amused at the idea of marriage. He had, as before said, in him the germ of a fine, noble character; but as yet he was a strange mixture of boyish romance, inexperience, and unprobed strength.

Never had the old castle of Heidelberg seemed more stately to him than when seen from the water on that moonlight night. Strangely weird, too, had been the appearance of the statues of Father Rhine and the Elector Charles Theodore, standing out from amidst the dark structure of the bridge. Milton had heard Elsie's little *canzonata* often sung by peasants on the Bay of Naples: never, however, had his soul been so deeply stirred by the sweetness of the simple melody.

At parting, Mr. Hardwicke had renewed the invitation to visit his studio; and, best of all, a tiny hand had pressed Milton's, and a gentle voice said:

"Thank you, once more, for saving Piccolo. I shall never forget your kindness."

Milton thought it would be hard if these proved but delusive hopes. He was more determined than ever to call on Miss O'Hara and tell her he had had the pleasure of making the acquaintance of her niece. Accordingly, at about three o'clock in the afternoon, having cast a scrutinising look into the glass to assure himself that his dress was faultless, he sallied forth

to call at the Hotel Victoria. Miss O'Hara's confidential maid Roper had considered it her duty not to leave the domestics of the hotel ignorant of the mistake which had caused Mr. Corbin's summary ejection from her mistress's apartments on the occasion of his first visit. The waiters were, therefore, quite *au fait* of the circumstances of the case, and the one who had been called to execute Miss O'Hara's orders sought ever after to apologise by unusual obsequiousness to the victim for the fact of his presence on the memorable occasion. With great alacrity, therefore, he now pronounced Miss O'Hara to be "happy to see Meester Corbin," and ushered that gentleman into her drawing-room. The parrots were fortunately in a silent mood, and Snap had gone for an airing with the above-mentioned lady's-maid.

Milton was most graciously received. He was much pleased to see Miss Hardwicke occupying an arm-chair at the further end of the room, though less so to behold easily reclining in a seat at her side an Englishman with fair whiskers, known to him as Mr. Slaney Claughton.

At once, on seeing who her aunt's visitor was, Elsie rose and came forward to greet him. Miss O'Hara looked a little surprised; then, turning to Milton, said quickly:

"Miss Hardwicke has told me, Mr. Corbin, how promptly you came to the rescue of her pet dog. We are all fond of domestic animals. Quite a family weakness, you know. No doubt my niece has inherited it from the O'Haras.

This last remark was made very emphatically. Miss

O'Hara did not miss any available opportunity for impressing on Mr. Claughton to what an illustrious family Elsie was related.

She offered Milton a cup of coffee, and then engaged him in an earnest discussion on the peculiarities of the parrot tribe. For the second time our hero longed to exterminate the offending species; but he let the old lady rattle on, only here and there introducing a sympathetic "Yes," or "No," and a rare "Certainly," or "I quite agree with you," as occasion required.

Meanwhile, his eyes and thoughts could not help wandering across to where Elsie was seated, laughing gaily at Mr. Claughton's efforts to amuse her. How Milton wished he could talk and make himself entertaining like that Englishman. It was very well for girls to look shy and pretty, without a word to say for themselves. Most men preferred that; but women did not. They liked a man who could talk and flirt and make himself pleasant.

Once or twice Elsie struck in with some irrelevant remark in the midst of a specially profound sentence of her aunt's, and told Mr. Claughton the whole story of Piccolo's encounter. But to get any real conversation with Elsie seemed hopeless; therefore Milton chose a convenient moment, when Miss Patricia, after a burst of eloquence, was compelled to pause for breath, and rose to take leave. The truth was, the old lady, bent on her matrimonial schemes, had only talked so fast to prevent the *tête-à-tête* between her niece and Mr. Claughton being disturbed.

Milton got no encouragement to prolong his visit, and left with his mind far less at ease than it had

been half an hour before. What right had that man to talk to Elsie, and monopolise her in that way? Why should she—now, come, this was going a little too far; what gave him a right to make rules of conduct for Miss Hardwicke? He was but an utter stranger to her, and ought not to entertain such foolish notions. What did she know of the longings that filled his heart? What did she dream of the love burning within him, which would last as long as life?

Silly fellow!—this last thought made all the foolishness which he fancied he had conquered return with tenfold force. He reached his rooms in a very different frame of mind from the hopeful one in which he had quitted them that same afternoon.

A night's rest made him look on things more philosophically. Early morning sheds some of its brightness over everything, and gives our thoughts and cares a very different aspect to what they wear when darkness renders them doubly gloomy, and causes our faint hearts to beat nervously. Despite the foregoing day bringing disappointment, all might soon come right; so reasoned Milton. This led him on to wonder how Elsie would receive him when Claughton was out of the way. Curiosity on this point made him decide to visit the artist's temporary studio, in hopes of seeing the "little Irish girl," as in his thoughts he still called her.

Having a good deal of unfinished work, Mr. Hardwicke had decided to stay at home that day, and when Milton sent in his card, came out into the passage to welcome him with a palette and brush in one hand and his constant companion—the short pipe—in the other.

"Glad to see you. Come in, come in;" then he added, in a lower tone: "I suppose you don't mind—an English gentleman is looking at my large painting of the courtyard of the castle. He seems tempted to buy it; but I dare say he won't stay long, and then we can have a quiet smoke together, if you feel inclined."

An unpleasant suspicion flashed across Milton's mind as to who this Englishman might be. He was right. A large picture, with the light advantageously falling on it, stood on an easel in the centre of the room; before it, in a careless attitude, was Slaney Claughton, gazing through his eyeglass at the subject before him.

"Good-morning, Mr. Claughton."

"Aw—I beg your pardon, good-morning."

There was little satisfaction displayed in either countenance. Each thought the other had chosen a most inconvenient time for his visit.

"Fine picture," remarked Slaney, laconically.

"Yes, indeed," answered Milton.

The conversation did not progress. Slaney had been very pleased with Miss O'Hara's niece on the previous day; indeed, it would not be too much to say he was just a very little in love. At least, hearing her father was an artist, he thought of employing an idle hour in paying a visit to his studio, and felt he should not be sorry to catch a glimpse of "that nice little girl."

A few introductory remarks from Hardwicke were followed by profuse praise, given in a nervous manner, by Milton, Slaney throwing in a remark here and

there. Then Hardwicke began putting some touches to a sketch of the view from the robber's tower, the scene of that charming improvised picnic, which Milton would never forget.

Slaney thought the way in which the artist (having taken his beloved short pipe between his teeth) had resumed his work, apparently forgetful of his visitors, a decidedly "cool" proceeding, and put it down to a wish on Mr. Hardwicke's part to appear indifferent about the proposed purchase of his large picture. But this was a mistake. It was merely that he always followed his own inclinations, regardless of the effect it might produce on others, and therefore, feeling rather bored by the lack of conversation, had resumed his painting.

Both the young men felt tempted to depart, and postpone their visit to a more convenient season; but neither cared to leave his rival in possession of the field.

At this juncture the door was thrown open, and in bounced Piccolo, whose spirits had by this time quite regained their original excellence. It seems almost needless to state that he was the forerunner of his mistress.

Elsie stood for a moment hesitatingly on the threshold, on seeing that her father was not alone, for she knew he disliked being disturbed when engaged with visitors on business matters. But Mr. Claughton said:

"I hope I am not so unfortunate as to be the cause of your beating a retreat, Miss Hardwicke," and held out his hand with the freedom of an old acquaintance.

Corbin again envied the Englishman's nonchalance; but his ruffled feelings were effectually smoothed by Elsie's giving the tips of her slight little fingers for a moment to Slaney, and then, seizing Piccolo in one arm, offering the other hand with a winning smile to himself, saying:

"How do you do, Mr. Corbin? I am so glad to see you. I want to show you how completely Piccolo has recovered from his alarm."

Milton took the proffered hand, and pressed it reverently. The foolish boy would have given much to raise it to his lips, but wondered what the Englishman would think, so let it reluctantly drop again, and congratulated Elsie on Piccolo's restoration to health.

Meanwhile Slaney had been apparently deeply engaged in the contemplation of the large picture on the easel. But he was not so absorbed in this occupation as to be unable to put in a few words, just at the right moment, when Milton's shyness had caused a pause in the conversation. In short, our bashful hero again fared no better than he had at Miss O'Hara's, but was forced to plunge into a conversation on colouring with the artist, and soon found himself beyond his depth.

Slaney, who had had no such moments of anguish for which to owe Milton a grudge, thought the latter "a nice sort of fellow, if he would only time his visits to the Hardwickes more conveniently," and in complete ignorance of the jealous feelings he had excited in the American, asked him to come to a certain *café* that evening and play a game of billiards. With his usual courtesy, Milton readily consented. Slaney then

turned to the artist and said that he unfortunately had an engagement which would not allow him to remain any longer, but he hoped to call again in a few days and discuss the subject of the picture; saying which, he took leave.

Vincent Hardwicke was not particularly pleased at the hoped-for purchaser leaving without coming to anything approaching an agreement, and put it down to Milton having interrupted them; this naturally did not tend to increase his amiability. However, he was wrong: for Slaney had had no idea of concluding the bargain so soon, and thus putting an end to the chief excuse for his visits.

Elsie soon saw that her father was vexed, and sought with her usual tact to hide it from their visitor by talking of the pleasant row home they had had the other evening. Her father's pipe being finished, she stopped and lit it afresh for him; then offered Mr. Corbin some cigarettes, which she had rolled herself. Hardwicke's tobacco was unexceptionable; this doubtless accounted for Milton thinking he had never smoked anything with such pleasure before. Perhaps those dainty fingers, which had already fascinated him so much when stained by the purple berries, had communicated some magic charm to the fumes of the cigarette.

The artist, who had by this time smoked himself into a more amiable mood, now led the way to the garden, where a pleasant arbour, through the lattice-work of which a coquettish rose-bud stole here and there, looked out on the tranquil waters of the Neckar.

To Milton's regret, Elsie did not go with them; in about a quarter of an hour, however, she re-appeared, carrying a tray, on which were a plate of biscuits and two high tumblers of sherry cobbler.

"If you will excuse the glasses being originally meant for beer, Mr. Corbin, I shall feel flattered if you will taste and pronounce on this brew. I believe it is quite a specialty of your country."

Milton drank, and declared most emphatically that it was nectar. What else could one so divine have prepared?

The air was delicious; also the cigarettes, and the company—charming. Time passed provokingly quickly: he lingered on as long as courtesy would allow, then reluctantly rose to go. Mr. Hardwicke asked him to join them in a row on the Neckar the next day. Altogether, this visit comforted him greatly.

CHAPTER VII.

AN UNPLEASANT SURPRISE.

On reaching his rooms in the Heugasse, Milton found a telegram on the table, which ran as follows:

"Paris, July —th, 185—.

"Sir,—Mr. Whitburn Corbin has arrived at the Grand Hotel; he is ill, and desires you to join him immediately.

"Rugden and Co.,
"American Bankers."

This was in all respects unpleasant news. Though Corbin senior was somewhat a stern parent, his son had nevertheless a great respect for him, and felt very sorry to think he had arrived alone and ill in Paris. But though it never occurred to Milton for one moment to hesitate in obeying his father, it was very hard to leave Heidelberg just when he had made acquaintance with the Hardwickes, and was looking forward to much pleasant intercourse with them. It was still harder to be obliged to go away leaving a rival in undisturbed possession.

Thoughts like these embittered Milton's mind as he made the preparations necessary for his journey. The term would still last some days, but he must not delay, and at any rate it was now too late to begin attending lectures. There were, however, some arrangements which he was willing to believe could not be carried out so hurriedly—a hack and the canoe to be disposed of, and some visits of ceremony to university magnates to be paid. Therefore, if his father insisted on his returning with him to America, he succeeded in reasoning himself into thinking it would really be quite necessary for him first to come back to Heidelberg for a few days; and thus, perhaps, his last chance of gaining Elsie Hardwicke's affections was not gone.

There was still another circumstance which gave him some comfort: it was that no express train would leave for Paris before five o'clock next morning, which might enable him to see Elsie once more. He ought certainly to send a message, or call and tell the Hardwickes of his inability to keep his boating engagement. Of course, he decided to be his own messenger; and

accordingly, for the second time that day, sallied forth in the direction of the pretty house by the river. At its garden-gate he met Mr. Hardwicke and Elsie coming out for a stroll by the waterside.

The artist looked rather astonished at this second visit, till the young man began to explain its object.

"So your governor is ill; well, I am sorry to hear it, and wish you were not going away. By George! one can never make a plan without something happening to interfere. I suppose we shall see you back one of these days?"

"Yes, indeed, I hope so; if the old gentleman gets well soon. But I may have to go home with him."

"Oh no, you must not do that!" exclaimed Elsie. "I dare say we shall still be here for some time, Mr. Corbin, and I should like you to show me how to manage a canoe. Besides, I am teaching Piccolo several new tricks, which you ought to see. I shall give you a grand representation on your return; so you must come back—you must, indeed."

It made Milton sad to hear her talk of such trifles when his heart was so full of regrets at the thought of the coming separation; had it not been so dark, however, he might have seen an expression in Elsie's usually merry eyes which would have told him that she would undoubtedly miss him. His diffidence and truly chivalrous courtesy charmed her greatly; hitherto her knowledge of men had been limited to her father's gruff behaviour, and the empty flatteries of foreigners who now and then visited his studio. If Mr. Whitburn Corbin's illness had not changed the course of events, she might probably have learned in time

seriously to consider the idea of wedding his handsome, dark-complexioned son.

"We will walk a little way in your direction," said Mr. Hardwicke.

Accordingly, they turned together towards the town. The conversation about future travelling plans and possible meetings then became so interesting that, almost without noticing what he did, Milton retraced his steps and returned once more with the artist and his daughter to their garden-gate.

"Good-night and good-bye. I hope we shall soon meet again," said Mr. Hardwicke.

Milton heartily echoed the sentiment.

Elsie's usual readiness of speech seemed to have left her; she only said:

"Not good-bye, but *au revoir*."

"Not a bad fellow, eh, Elsie, my girlie?" asked the artist, as the two peered through the increasing darkness at the retreating figure. "Would you rather marry him or Claughton?"

This rough question placed the facts for the first time in a definite shape before Elsie's mind. Yes, it was true; both these new acquaintances interested her. But why did her father talk about her marrying one of them? Who would think of making a silly little thing like her his wife?

Elsie underrated herself; in addition to owning great charms of person, she was a sound-principled girl, and, if not exactly clever, yet handy and skilled in many gentle feminine arts. The man she married would find her faithful and loving. But she was still very young, and too essentially womanly by nature to

take the initiative in courtship, as some daughters of this nineteenth century do not shrink from doing.

On reaching the bridge, Milton turned and strained his eyes to catch one last glimpse of his newly-made friends. He fancied he could trace the outline of two figures by the garden-gate; and, as he gazed, wondered when next he should see the broad shoulders of the little artist, and the slight figure of his daughter. After crossing the bridge and groping his way through the crooked, ill-lighted streets, till reaching a corner which boasted of a dim lamp, he took out his watch and found it was time to keep his billiard appointment. It was not much farther to the place of meeting, and he found Slaney already there, amusing himself by knocking the balls about.

Milton spoke of his father's illness, which necessitated his own departure. Slaney, hearing he was to start so early, proposed that they should stay together till it was time to go to the station, as it was scarcely worth while for Milton to go to bed. Being rather at a loss for an occupation to while away the time, and feeling too unsettled in his mind to sleep, Milton agreed to the proposal, though inwardly smiling at the irony of fate which led him to pass his last evening at Heidelberg in amicable converse with the man who would most likely stand in the way of his happiness.

After several games of billiards, and a hearty supper, the young men adjourned to Milton's rooms to see to the removal of his luggage; this done, they lit their cigars, and spent the last hour in pacing up and down the *anlagen*.

Slaney was an agreeable companion, and talked pleasantly about his home-life; the enjoyment he found in shooting grouse on the Scotch moor his father rented; the delights of a good run with the D——shire hounds; and the pleasant life he led in town. In short, Milton began to wonder if he had been too hasty in judging this new acquaintance, whom he had set down as a fop, taking a great dislike to what he considered his "free-and-easy manners" when in Miss Hardwicke's society. But perhaps, after all, the difference lay in the customs of their respective nations. English people apparently disliked much ceremony, whilst Americans resembled the French in the never-failing attention they paid to the interchange of small acts of politeness. Milton felt, too, that it might be unjust to expect every man to render the same reverential homage to his chosen divinity, which he himself felt drawn to bestow on her.

Claughton's accounts of England greatly interested him, and he hoped to persuade his father to go over there with him.

"Corbin, how long have you known the Hardwickes? The artist is rather a surly old bear; but, by Jove, his little daughter is a deuced pretty girl!"

What a revulsion of feeling this speech of Slaney's caused in Milton's mind! To call his Elsie a "deuced pretty girl" was bordering on sacrilege in his eyes. He laconically answered the first sentence by: "Only a day or two," and entirely passed over the rest of his companion's remarks.

Slaney had asked this to sound Milton, and ended by thinking the latter was very much in love with

Miss Hardwicke, though he did not choose to own that she had made any impression on him.

Glad to change the subject, Milton remarked that it was time to go at once to the station, or he would certainly miss the train; they quickened their pace, and on reaching the platform found there was really no time to lose. Slaney begged Milton to call on him if he came to London, adding that he would be very glad indeed to see him; and then, after shaking hands heartily, gave him a vigorous slap on the shoulders, which British expression of feeling somewhat astonished the young American.

Milton got hastily into a carriage, and was scarcely seated before the train whizzed out of the station.

Young Claughton disliked saying good-bye to anyone, and, as he walked back to his hotel in the early morning light, felt sorry for Milton having to start off for Paris, not knowing how ill he might find his father. Slaney was kind-hearted and manly; not all the lavish indulgence of his parents had succeeded in spoiling him.

I fear Milton's feelings just then were not quite so amiable; but we must not in justice forget that one man was going back to his comfortable bed, with the future prospect of frequently seeing the attractive Elsie, if he felt so disposed, whilst the other was being rattled along in an uncomfortable railway-carriage, wondering disconsolately what the future might have in store for him. Added to which, the sunshine was being left behind in reality as well as metaphor. Before half-an-hour had passed, heavy drops of rain were pattering against the windows of

the compartment in which Milton was seated, and banks of threatening-looking clouds, no pleasant omen of coming events, shut out the view on either side. In short, our hero felt as if all the powers of earth and sky were leagued against him; which was very foolish, but not very surprising in a boy of barely twice ten summers who was desperately in love.

CHAPTER VIII.

SHALL SHE GO TO ABYSSINIA?

A FEW days after bidding Milton farewell, Slaney Claughton was again invited to coffee by Miss O'Hara, and, as before, found Miss Hardwicke with her aunt. The afternoon passed very pleasantly, and confirmed him in the opinion that Miss Hardwicke was a very pretty girl, to which he added the additional comment of "uncommonly nice and ladylike." He was a fastidious critic where girls were concerned; of those he had met in London, many had taken their cue from the promptings of designing mothers, and praised and admired him to such a degree, that his innate good sense revolted at length at being thus run after. Elsie's simple, unaffected ways, the innocent manner in which she made any remark that occurred to her, and her gentle frankness, which never stooped to flattery, pleased him very much. Above all, after being accustomed to the society of utterly *blasés* people, to whom whole-souled enjoyment was a thing of the past, it was very refreshing to meet with some one who took

genuine pleasure in such simple things as scrambling over the hills in search of flowers and berries; rowing a heavy, ill-built boat with oars of the most primitive kind; or teaching a Maltese terrier to jump for biscuits.

What did Elsie think of Mr. Claughton? She thought that he undoubtedly improved on acquaintance. At first his manner had struck her as being careless; but she was accustomed to associate with foreigners, who make more outward show of courtesy; besides, Mr. Corbin, on whom her thoughts had dwelt a good deal of late, was really punctiliously polite. Still there was a pleasant candour and trustworthiness about Slaney, which was a new and agreeable characteristic in her eyes. Elsie owned to herself that she had never experienced such a feeling of safety in the intercourse which her father's professional affairs had caused them to have with many foreigners of high birth. When some Italian prince or Hungarian noble, frequenting the studio, had ventured to offer a bouquet, or pay a compliment to the artist's blue-eyed daughter, that little lady had always behaved with dignified reserve to them, prompted by a strong innate instinct, that warned her to resist any attempt at flirtation; now, on the contrary, she felt pleased at the prospect of frequently meeting this new friend—yes, she felt him to be indeed a friend.

And now, lastly, though in that haughty personage's estimation certainly not least in importance, a few words on Miss O'Hara's sentiments concerning the success of her second coffee-party. If the good lady's spirit, long resting in the land of shadows, will not

return revengefully to haunt me, I will sum up by briefly reporting what Mrs. Roper told Mr. Claughton's courier in strictest confidence; it was that "the missus seemed mighty pleased about summut," and the abigail had no doubt it was "because she 'oped Mr. Claughton would soon lead little missie to the 'ymeneal halter."

Mrs. Roper was fond of expressing herself in classical English.

One thing is certain, namely, that Miss O'Hara issued a succession of invitations to Mr. Claughton, which he accepted most readily, knowing he would be sure to meet Miss Hardwicke. The natural result was that in course of time Slaney's liking for Elsie deepened into love. He had bought Mr. Hardwicke's large picture, and intended to send it to adorn the parental drawing-room in Harley Street; but his purse was a long one, so he continued frequently to visit the artist and talk over further purchases. The artist hoped, by the help of an old friend at Milan, to get two very valuable paintings, attributed to Luini and Guicciardini, to be despatched to England at the same time as his picture of the castle courtyard.

It was strange that Slaney should suddenly have developed such artistic tastes. He was for ever strolling down to Mr. Hardwicke's studio to get the benefit of his experience. This led to his being often invited to join the painter in a row on the river; and it was seldom that a little black nose, surmounted by a pink bow, did not herald the advent of a very charming addition to the party.

Many pleasant expeditions took place in the cool of the evening; and Slaney possessed an advantage

which Milton had often regretted not to own; Nature, amongst the gifts she had profusely showered on the young Englishman, had given him a rich mellow voice, which enabled him to sing duets with Elsie; their voices blended admirably. What would Milton not have given to be able to join harmoniously in the song of the elf who had bewitched him?

Writing to his father, Slaney mentioned having called on Miss O'Hara, as his parents wished, and added that he had on several occasions met a very pretty and agreeable niece of hers. This news did not displease the stockbroker. His wife had formerly been tolerably intimate with Miss O'Hara, having in their younger days met her at the house of a mutual friend. Now said friend was dead, and the link being broken, intercourse had ceased between the two ladies, who rarely heard of each other. Of the rest of the O'Hara family, the stockbroker knew little; he only remembered there was a brother still living; further, that they were of ancient descent, a fact, as has been already mentioned, of great importance in the old gentleman's eyes. Consequently the next time Claughton senior wrote to his son, he remarked that he was glad to hear Slaney had called upon Miss O'Hara; it was pleasant to meet people abroad with whose antecedents one had some acquaintance, for one never knew whom one might come across. After which most original remark the careful father wound up by saying that the O'Haras were a very good old family. Having ended this letter, he wiped his pen with business-like precision, complacently rubbed his fat, white hands together, and contemplated

with a gratified expression the crest engraven on the signet-ring adorning the little finger on his left hand. Even though circumstances had compelled him to sign the good name of Claughton to many a paper or letter concerning a stockbroker's business, his son should, through the riches thus gained, restore the pristine importance of the family. A marriage with an O'Hara was by no means undesirable, yet in his letter he had prudently foreborne mentioning Miss O'Hara's niece. All would probably go well, if only the young people were left to manage matters themselves; parental interference, on the other hand, often proved a mar-plot. Oh, wise old man, you may live to think your supposed wisdom but short-sighted foolishness!

More than a month passed in pleasant and frequent intercourse with the Hardwickes ere Slaney came to consider seriously how matters stood. Perhaps far more time might have passed before he would have thought of probing the real feelings of his heart, had not the artist, eager to bring matters to a crisis, one day remarked, in his usual abrupt fashion:

"My work here is nearly finished, and I am getting tired of being stationary; I think we shall leave soon."

"Have you made any plans?" asked Slaney, to whom this sudden statement was no pleasant surprise.

"No. Perhaps we shall go to the Austrian Tyrol, or some of the less frequented parts of Switzerland. I have a fancy for the Alps of Glarus; there are some splendid subjects for the brush in the Klönthal."

"Shall you keep on this rustic retreat?"

Slaney began to think it time to make his own plans.

"I think not. Later on, I should like to go up the Nile or to Abyssinia; only Elsie would not care to rough it in the way we should have to do. Comfortable travelling costs a great deal of money."

This information was given out in a fragmentary way, as the artist sat puffing at his beloved short pipe in that arbour where Milton had once passed such a blissful forenoon. Soon he began on another topic, and Slaney joined in with apparent interest: all the same Mr. Hardwicke's abrupt announcement concerning his probable movements had been a decided shock to him. He kept revolving in his mind whether he must really give up this delightful intimacy with only a very uncertain prospect of renewal, or whether a means of escape could be found.

"So old Hardwicke wants to go to Abyssinia," he said to himself. "Very likely he would think it great fun; but what an awful place to go to! Goodness knows where he will want to fly off to next—Siberia, or Iceland, or Terra del Fuego. Indeed, it is not a fit life for that girl to lead, exposed to every kind of climate—heat, cold, hardships of every kind. If the old fellow died, little Elsie might be left alone in some strange country, many hundreds of miles away from any civilization, with half-naked savages executing a war-dance round her, licking their lips at the prospect of a white morsel of flesh, or solemnly constructing a funeral pile on which to burn her at the same time as her father's remains."

Slaney began to feel as if he had been providentially sent into the world to save Elsie from so terrible a fate. He felt quite roused from his usual quiet way

of taking things; in short, his feelings were very like those of most young men when much in love. Whilst the above told conversation took place, the artist and Slaney Claughton were still seated in the rose-arbour. Mr. Hardwicke was expecting Elsie every moment to return from one of her rambles on the hillside at the back of their house.

The creaking of rusty hinges, a shrill bark, a gate swung open, the sound of feet on the gravel walk, were followed by a brown silken ball suddenly jumping on to Slaney's knee, whereupon he inquired:

"Piccolo, you dear little man, where is your mistress?"

"Here to answer for herself," said a well known voice, and Elsie's blue eyes sparkled roguishly over her father's shoulder.

She never looked prettier than when returning from a walk, for then there was an additional tinge of pink in her cheeks, and often a garland of flowers adorned her hat.

Slaney's mind was quite made up.

No, that little girl was most unfit to rough it in Abyssinia!

CHAPTER IX.

IN PARIS.

THE journey to Paris seemed interminable to Milton, although the train was an express and sped along at a goodly pace, and the hard stiff cushions on which his head sought vainly for rest made him wish for the

luxuriously easy "cars" of his own native land. The fine old tower of Strasburg cathedral, and the champagne at Epernay, proved equally incapable of attracting him. He bought papers and did not read them; he lit cigarettes, and, after drawing a few whiffs, threw the remainder out of the window. In short, he was utterly restless and thoroughly miserable. The further he moved away from Heidelberg, the more he wished to be once again near Elsie and speak the words he had longed yet never dared to utter. Oh! why was Claughton so ready of speech and he so detestably shy? Why might Claughton remain in the same place with Elsie, probably see her often, and—oh! maddening thought—perhaps gain her love, whilst a cruel destiny carried *him* every moment further and further away?

Ere the train dashed into the great Paris station, Milton's thoughts had taken a new, but not pleasant turn. Whilst he was selfishly sighing for what was apparently not destined to be his, his father might be lying dangerously ill, perhaps dying, alone in an hotel. Unlike most of his compatriots, who are for ever "making trips to Europe," Mr. Whitburn Corbin had never crossed the Atlantic before. Of course, being a well-known and highly-esteemed citizen of New York, he had many acquaintances in the great capital popularly known as the American's Paradise, and doubtless any of these would willingly come to him if he desired it. But he was no model invalid, as his son very well knew, and would rather fret and fume, and even die alone, than have a mere acquaintance "bothering round him." The necessity of collecting the rugs which he

had scattered profusely round him, in hopes of resting more comfortably, and the bustle attendant on getting his luggage passed through the Custom-house, disturbed Milton's train of thought.

"To the Grand Hotel," he called out to the driver of the *fiacre*. As the cab drove up to the monster hotel, the noisy clang of a great bell heralded its arrival. A stately head-waiter, with irreproachably white waistcoat, surrounded by a black-coated attendant throng, moved majestically towards the threshold. A group of Americans talking merrily were coming down the steps.

An odd medley of ideas passed through Milton's brain. The thought of what an unsuitable place to be ill at, and what a terrible one to die in, crossed his mind, while almost at the same moment he could not help comparing his own disarranged attire, each seam of which harboured innumerable particles of dust, with the scrupulously neat toilet of that composed-looking head-waiter. Milton half smiled as he thought how painfully insignificant all travellers, bearing the marks of a long journey, must feel before this unapproachable-looking being!

"Is Mr. Whitburn Corbin here?"

"Yes, sir. He arrived the night before last."

Thank God, he was alive then.

Whilst two porters went before, bearing his heavier luggage, and the black-coated satellites seized on his rugs, sticks, hat-box, and dressing-bag, the head-waiter, with a dignified bow, leisurely preceded Milton up the staircase, and then threw open a door:

"Mr. Corbin's son, I presume, sir?"

"Yes."

"The gentleman has been hourly expecting you."

Wherewith a second door was thrown open, and Milton found himself ushered into his father's presence.

"Come at last, my boy? I guess I have been nearly tired of waiting for you."

Mr. Whitburn Corbin was a fine old man, and bore a strong general likeness to his handsome son. Having hitherto omitted to describe the personal appearance of the latter, I will now briefly attempt to sketch him, as well as his father. Both had the same clearly-defined nose and chin, which gave them the appearance of being of French extraction. Indeed, the Corbin family (with a little pardonable inconsistency often noticeable in Republicans), thought much of good blood, and proudly declared themselves to be descendants of the Marquis de Corbin, one of the many Legitimist nobles whom the Reign of Terror had driven to seek a home in a new and free country.

Mr. Whitburn Corbin's hair was snow-white, but his eyebrows and moustaches still retained their early blackness. His son had the same bushy brows, but his almost boyish face was otherwise still perfectly smooth. In the penetrating expressiveness of his dark brown eyes he again closely resembled his father.

Yet, despite all these points in common, there was something more than the mere disparity of age which was most dissimilar in these two faces. It lay in that indefinable, subtle something which we designate expression.

Both these men's characters were to be unmistakably read in their countenances, and it was in this outward

sign of their inward selves that they so greatly differed.

We know very well that the younger man was no ideal conglomeration of the four cardinal virtues, but just a warm-hearted youth, who was very much inclined to be idle, and in that respect self-indulgent. Still, in justice be it said that this indolence might in some measure be attributed to constitutional delicacy, his mother, who died when he was a little child, having been consumptive. But he was by no means self-seeking in any other way. Now his father bore a completely opposite character to this. Mr. Whitburn Corbin, from the time he reached manhood, had been diligent in business. Punctual to a moment in making his appearance in the counting-house, never allowing himself to be idle, he was extremely severe on people who were. Therefore this one failing of his sweet-tempered, easy-going son's frequently called forth his censure. Though generous and upright, he was also haughty and imperious. Indeed, no absolute monarch, no Roman dictator, ever ruled with firmer sway than did this worthy republican over the members of his household.

In this world of ceaseless progress, characters, like all else, cannot remain stationary; they must necessarily expand in one or the other direction. Time had not tended to soften the elder Corbin's hardness, and rub his sharp corners smooth. On the occasion of this our first introduction to him, the very hatred of being ill, and therefore idle, made him doubly despotic. His son, once set at rest concerning him by the no means feeble tones which greeted his arrival, could not

help making a mental not very pleasant comparison between the way time would pass with a fractious invalid, and the manner in which it might have been spent in initiating a blue-eyed pupil into all the art required to manage a canoe.

'Well, sir, I am glad to find you so cheery. I started by the first train I could catch,' said our young friend respectfully.

'I guess I would like to know for what I came to Europe, when one is much better off on our side of the Atlantic. On reaching Liverpool I asked for "crackers," and they said they did not keep fireworks. As to chicken salad they had never heard of such a thing.'

Milton explained that English people were eccentric enough to say 'biscuits' instead of 'crackers,' and generally sympathised with his father on the ignorance he had met with. In his own mind he meanwhile decided that Europe undoubtedly did not agree with the old gentleman, who had seldom appeared less disposed to be amiable. On inquiry, however, Corbin senior's irritability was sufficiently accounted for. It appeared that immediately on arriving in Paris he had been threatened with an attack of gout. It was then that he had ordered a telegram to be despatched to his son. Prompt medical aid had warded off all serious results, but the gout was not thoroughly shaken off, and Mr. Whitburn Corbin was in that happy frame of mind usual with persons expecting an attack.

For six long weeks father and son remained in the French capital. Milton thought he had never known a town so insufferably hot or dull. Its attractions had no power to interest him; he felt so disinclined to let

himself be amused. Where were the Hardwickes? What use had Claughton made of the advantageous position prepared for him by fortune? Such were the thoughts which again and again suggested themselves to his mind.

Out of doors no thunder came to cool the atmosphere; indoors there were storms in plenty, but their effect was enervating rather than beneficial.

At length the gout having declared itself, old Mr. Corbin partially recovered his temper. Then there was some business for the firm to be transacted, and innumerable visits in connection with it to be paid and received.

It was good for young men to learn about such things, his father said, so Milton had to listen to frequent explanations concerning advantageous investments and the caution requisite in making them; whilst all the while his heart knew but one treasure, for which he would unhesitatingly have braved any risks.

"I guess it is time we were in England, my boy."

Any change was welcome. England, of course, meant in their case London—the centre of the business world—and no amount of interviews in depressingly sombre offices should keep Milton from calling on Claughton, and getting the latest news of Elsie.

'I don't know but what you had better come home with me this fall, Milton. You are only idling on the Continent, and had far better settle down steadily to work at home. I am not the man I was before these frequent attacks of gout, and you must learn to take my place," continued Corbin, senior.

This blow was none the less heavy for not being entirely unexpected. The young man had allowed his hopes to dwell, more perhaps than he was himself aware, on the delightful possibility of continuing his stay in Europe and effecting another meeting with Elsie. He now replied dejectedly that he must at any rate first visit Heidelberg, as there were several things which he had left undone there at the time of his hurried journey to Paris.

"Then write about them," said his father.

But Milton was not to be so easily defeated, and after expending much eloquence on the difficulty of settling matters satisfactorily by letter, obtained the desired consent in the following unexpected fashion:

"Well, there is no good in trying to talk sense to you young fellows. In my time things were different, and the advice of older men was respected. As you will have your own way, start for Heidelberg to-night and meet me in London on Saturday."

This was short notice, for it was already Tuesday; but to refuse so good an offer was not to be thought of for one moment, and at eight o'clock that same evening Milton took his seat in the express train for Strasburg. His heart was beating anxiously at the thought of what fortune might have in store for him, as it had done when he started for Paris, six weeks before; only the mere fact of being bound for the scene of those fondly remembered July days made him take a far more hopeful view of matters than on the previous occasion.

CHAPTER X.

WILL HE FIND ELSIE?

WHEN Milton reached Heidelberg, on that bright September evening, his first idea was to change his travelling dress, and saunter down to that house on the banks of the Neckar, towards which his thoughts had often turned lovingly during the past six weeks. On the way he was accosted by a German student of his acquaintance; Herr von Balden told him a grand *fête* had been arranged that day to honour the young Prince of Kleinbesitzenstein, who was visiting the town. Most students who happened to be at Heidelberg—it was out of term time—had driven with his Serene Highness to Neckarsteinach, a village situated on the river, whence it derives its name. There, on a slight eminence, amid peaceful woodlands, stand the ruined castles of three savage brothers—well named Landschaden, a harm to the land—who were perpetually at deadly feuds amongst themselves, and notorious far and wide for their love of pillaging.

Amidst these inspiring surroundings, the "*flotte bursche*"* of the University were to hold a jovial meeting, and drink much beer to the health of Prince Kleinbesitzenstein, the "Academia," and all pretty maidens; this being successfully accomplished, they were to return towards evening in gaily decorated barges to Heidelberg, and as they reached the bridge the castle would be brilliantly illuminated.

* Jolly lads.

Herr von Balden wound up his description of the festive programme by linking his arm in Milton's, saying he had reserved his forces for the evening, and had arranged to adjourn with a party of friends to a beer-garden on the further bank of the river, where they could have an excellent view of the proceedings, and, according to student phraseology, make a night of it.

"*Nicht wahr*, Corbin, you come with?"

The German idiom *mitkommen*, when literally translated, sounds strange to English ears. In the present case it was pronounced in a manner which precluded the possibility of a refusal without offending the speaker; therefore with a secret sigh at the prolonged uncertainty concerning Elsie, Milton let himself be carried off, inwardly hoping that amongst the crowd of spectators he might come across the Hardwickes.

Herr von Balden led the way to a small garden, on the further bank of the river, where a number of young men were already grouped, glass in hand, round rough, wooden tables covered with foaming tankards of beer. All rose, and with cordial greetings made room for the new-comers, who thereupon drank to the health of each member of the company in turn.

"Dat isch recht, Corbin, dat you are back, ole fellow," said a handsome young man with a strong German accent.

"I hope you enjoyed your visit to the *Herr Papa*," cried another.

"What did the old gentleman think of the nice little bill for champagne suppers?" asked a compatriot,

who had not forgotten to bring the home twang to Europe.

Milton replied briefly to the various kindly greetings and questions, assuring the last speaker that his father had been very lenient about money matters; but he felt too pre-occupied to enter into all the jokes and laughter.

"*Alle Teufel,* I tink you are in love, Corbin," said his friend Von Balden at length. "You seem to have left all your good-humour in Paris."

"Yes, yes, Von Balden is right," remarked a fat, jolly looking, little man with a large, white plaister on his cheek, and another strip across the tip of his nose. "You have certainly left your heart in Paris."

"Unless it is still in the keeping of *deiner alten flamme,** the artist's daughter," said a spectacled youth with a superabundance of hair.

Evidently Milton's infatuation had not passed unnoticed by his student friends.

All these remarks made him feel very uncomfortable, and long for an opportunity to beat a surreptitious retreat.

The night lent itself admirably to enhance the effect of the illuminations. Dark clouds covered the sky, making it difficult to find one's way, and the only source of fear to the anxiously waiting crowd was the possibility of an unwelcome shower of rain. And now the momentous hour was at hand at which his Serene Highness of Kleinbesitzenstein and his friends were expected to return down the river; in short, all was on the tiptoe of expectation, as the reporters have it.

* Old flame.

Of course, there were two or three false alarms and deceptive cries of—"They are coming, they are coming," which proved to be merely some private boat, also on the look-out. But at length the sound of men's voices singing in chorus announced the advent of the eagerly looked-for barge:

"Lalala, lala, la, lalalala,
Frei ist der Bursch,
Frei ist der Bursch."*

This favourite students' song, sounding from the barge, was quickly caught up and enthusiastically re-echoed by hundreds of voices on either bank of the river. A gleam of light shot up into the sky and revealed the gaily beflagged barge filled with white, red, yellow and green-capped students, nearing the old stone bridge. Then an enraptured "Ah!" broke from the lips of the crowd; when suddenly, as if called forth by the waving of an enchanter's wand, the ruined castle of the Electors Palatine stood out from amid the surrounding darkness, bathed in a flood of gold red light.

For a few brief seconds all gazed in silent admiration at the glorious sight, till the ruby tints gradually faded into green and blue, promising the most charming moonlight effect—but then, drop, drop, drop, down came the dreaded rain heavy and fast. The roar of heaven's mighty artillery rent the air, and flash after flash of forked lightning lit up the plain in the direction of the *Bergstrasse.*

Feeling their enthusiasm considerably damped, the disappointed townspeople pushed and elbowed each

* Free is the student-lad.

other in their hurry to reach the bridge, and from thence the shelter of their respective homes.

Milton had been seated with several of his student friends on the beer-garden wall, whence they commanded an excellent view of the proceedings; now that this sudden storm caused the group to disperse, he jumped down into the road, then hastily buttoning his coat, and turning up the collar, joined the crowd which was making for the bridge. Despite the violence of the storm, Milton felt half-tempted to go to the artist's lodgings, but hesitated on reflecting on his drenched condition; besides, it was almost impossible to deviate from the course taken by the majority. Whilst these thoughts were suggesting themselves to him, he received a light tap on the shoulder, and an unmistakeable voice said, or rather shouted, in his ear:

"Hulloa! I'm blessed if this ain't Corbin!"

For once Milton could return the greeting cordially; it was Mr. Twirl, who would be sure to know about the Hardwickes.

"Glad to see you," said our hero, stretching out his hand. "I called on you just before I went to Paris in the end of July, and was told you had left Heidelberg."

"Why, yes, I got kind of tired of the place and sitting every day next to that old Irish gal"—poor Miss O'Hara!—"So I went to Baden-Baden, to try and lose a little money. I stayed there as long as the cash lasted; when I returned here you had flown, my boy," replied Mr. Twirl.

"My father was ill in Paris, and telegraphed for me. I must leave again for England the day after

to-morrow; the old gentleman is already there waiting for me. But we are both wet through, and had better go back to our hotel and change our clothes. I am stopping at the Victoria; I suppose you are also? We might brew some punch together to keep off a chill."

Mr. Twirl, who, as Milton rightly imagined, was staying at the same hotel, most willingly accepted the proffered invitation.

When, in less than an hour, the two were smoking their cigars with steaming glasses of punch placed invitingly before them, Mr. Twirl remarked:

"Wal, yer never told me how long yer had been here."

"I arrived this afternoon."

"Then I cal'clate no one could accuse yer of letting the grass grow under yer feet, if yer off agin the day after to-morrow."

"I cannot possibly stay longer. My father would scarcely let me come, as it is. Besides, I have not much to do: a few visits of ceremony to pay, also some bills. Then I have a canoe to dispose of, and a horse, which I guess has been eating his head off during my absence. That is all."

"And a little professor to sit at the feet of? Yer forget her in yer enumerations," added Mr. Twirl, with a knowing, and, as Milton deemed it, most provoking wink.

Milton coloured, but remained silent; and Twirl, having emptied and then refilled his glass, said:

"The Hardwickes were to have left yesterday; but I don't know whether Miss Elsie managed to persuade her father to stay for the illuminations to-day. I believe she hoped to do so."

Seeing Milton looked very blank at this announcement, Mr. Twirl added, by way of comfort:

"Perhaps it may prove best for yer peace of mind, if they have gone, my boy; for I cal'clate that fair-whiskered English chap stole a march on yer during yer absence."

"Is Mr. Claughton here?" asked Milton quietly, though inwardly writhing.

"No; he left for London the day before yesterday. Some people say the engagement is what the French call 'an accomplished fact.' But I can't say whether this is true."

Milton said nothing, but he left Mr. Twirl to finish the punch, and soon went to bed, excusing himself on the plea of being tired after his journey.

The following morning, though feeling as if he had somehow managed to catch a cold on his chest, he sallied forth at an early hour. He had gone to bed with a strong determination to pay his bills and visits, dispose of his canoe and horse, and leave by the next train, turning his back for ever on the Hardwickes. But as usual, daylight brought less gloomy thoughts, and before he had finished dressing, he had made up his mind that the rumoured engagement between Elsie and Slaney Claughton could be nothing but an idle report; therefore he now turned his steps towards the Hardwickes' lodgings.

As he lifted the latch of the familiar gate, a feeling of disappointment crept over him, for the windows of that portion of the house which the Hardwickes had occupied were thrown wide open, and strips of carpet and bedding suspended from them proved eloquent,

though silent witnesses, to a departure. At the further end of the garden he could see the stout form of the landlady, clad in a striped petticoat, and loose calico jacket, whilst her sleeves, rolled back to the elbow, displayed a pair of stout arms, which were actively employed in beating the dust out of a carpet by means of a wicker implement resembling a fish-slice in shape.

Milton accosted this worthy matron in his best German, and, with a forlorn feeling in his heart, inquired after the Hardwickes. Turning a fat, bearded, but by no means ill-natured-looking visage on him, the good lady stopped in her employment and said:

"You have come too late; they left yesterday. The young Fraülein would have liked to stay for the illuminations, which are generally a truly fine sight; but the Herr Papa, who is rather cross, would not consent. However, the rain spoilt half the sight, so it was no great loss; and as the fair-haired Engländer had left for London, the young lady must certainly be glad to go there also. For of course they must be going to be married soon—Herr Claughton was always in the house of late."

This and much more information the old woman readily supplied; indeed, Milton had difficulty in cutting short her flow of garrulity and making his escape with an abrupt "Good-morning."

So it was true, quite true; all his worst fears were realised, and Claughton had gained the coveted prize.

He did not like the notion of the Hardwickes being in London; happily it was fully large enough for him

to give them a wide berth. Unfortunately, however, the very people one does not wish to see are sure to show themselves at the most inconvenient moment; at least, such was his experience, the unfortunate youth thought. Yet join his father he must. Altogether it seemed that the best thing he could do would be to return to America as soon as possible, and now he would hurry away from Heidelberg and all its painful associations.

In less than two hours he had called on the university magnates, who fortunately proved for the most part to be taking a holiday. Having divested himself of the dress suit and high hat which were *de rigueur* on such occasions, and donned a more comfortable suit, Milton made very short work of the rest of the important business which had brought him to Heidelberg, and was able to leave for London that afternoon. It was with no small satisfaction that he felt himself safe out of reach of that merciless Mr. Twirl.

CHAPTER XI.

RETROSPECTIVE.

AVAILING ourselves of that charming privilege accorded to authors of going back on the wheels of time, let us see how it fared with Slaney Claughton during Milton's absence.

In those early days it seemed as if, contrary to all precedent, the course of that true love, which we have hinted at as dawning in his heart, was running remark-

ably smooth. As yet all things combined to favour his suit. The Hardwickes' threatened departure was indefinitely postponed, and the artist continued to invite Slaney to join in those pleasant expeditions up the river to which Milton had looked forward with such bright anticipations. Miss O'Hara also felt confident that the desired crisis was at hand, and the invitations to coffee in her *salon* were constantly repeated. Therefore Slaney found frequent opportunities for meeting Elsie, and gladly availed himself of them.

Even at the risk of doing violence to the feelings of all my readers of the fair sex, truth compels me to state that these meetings were equally pleasant to Elsie Hardwicke. We shall remember that when Milton left, her interest in the young American and Slaney Claughton was still trembling in the balance. Milton's departure turned the scale in favour of Slaney. To be dear to the memory though lost to sight, is well-nigh an impossibility if one is forced to decamp on the eve of victory, leaving a well-matched adversary ready to take the field and reap all the advantages of finding the way prepared for bringing the citadel to a state of submission. In other words, the susceptible state of a heart in which a craving for love is dawning often makes it easy to win; and so it proved in this case. After a week of regrets, Elsie let herself be consoled by Slaney's persevering efforts to divert and interest her. In justice, however, it must be borne in mind that the young lady was by no means aware of the feelings with which she had inspired Milton. And the most soured and critical of chaperons could never have found a trace of coquetry in her behaviour towards him. She

had always treated him with the same straightforward merry frankness which generally characterised her behaviour.

Slaney, as we have already seen, had quite made up his mind to propose to the artist's daughter; yet he was loth to alter the existing state of things; the duets with Elsie, the expeditions up the Neckar, and meetings at Miss O'Hara's, were so delightful. At length, about a fortnight before Milton revisited Heidelberg, Slaney thought the time had come when it would be advisable to prepare his father for the possibility of soon welcoming home a daughter-in-law. If the reader will let himself be translated to the breakfast-room of the stockbroker's house in Harley Street, he will see how the intelligence was received there.

All the fashionable world is out of town, and old Mr. Claughton would gladly have followed in their train; but not having felt well of late, has decided, after paying a short round of visits in the country, to give up all thoughts of Scotland, and return to his London house, there to await Slaney's arrival from the Continent. How the lad could stay abroad after the twelfth of August his father could not understand, nor why he did not continue his tour instead of remaining so long at Heidelberg. Could this attractive niece of Miss O'Hara's be the cause?

Now September had come, and the partridges seemed as powerless as the grouse to bring Slaney home.

Having learnt the reason which made the Claughtons' house form so striking a contrast to the deserted-looking buildings around it, let us enter its comfortable, red-curtained dining-room, at about ten o'clock a.m.,

and we shall see a bright fire burning in the grate, whilst two elderly people are seated at breakfast.

A meek-looking little woman, whose bands of smooth grey hair are surmounted by a very becoming cap, composed of blue ribands and gracefully-falling white lace lappets, is presiding at the well-appointed breakfast-table. She has a pleasing look in her large, brown eyes, and there is something motherly in the roundness of her soft, pink cheeks; but a weak, almost silly expression about both mouth and chin take away from the interest which the upper part of her face inspires. This is Mrs. Claughton.

Whilst she makes tea, her husband is dividing his attention between some cold partridge and a large number of letters and papers which lie at the side of his plate.

"Is there a letter from Slaney, dear Eustace?" asks Mrs. Claughton, in a gentle, slightly drawling tone.

"Yes, Cecilia; but don't interrupt me just now, I have not opened it yet,' and the grey-whiskered, bald-headed, neat-looking stockbroker began to munch some toast, as he ran his eye rapidly over two or three letters; at length he paused and said:

"Here is a note from Howson the agent, who undertook the transport of those pictures Slaney has bought; he says I shall get the case this morning. Immediately after breakfast I must see where they ought to be hung. Perhaps, though, I had better wait a little and write and ask Rutherford to step in and see them; he is an excellent judge of pictures.'

"Would it not be best to wait till Slaney's return,

dear Eustace?" asked his wife. "He might wish to see to the hanging himself."

"Not at all; not at all, Cecilia. You are always ready with suggestions, excepting when I ask for them," was the ungracious rejoinder. "I shall send Rutherford a note this morning."

Here the discussion ended, if anything so one-sided as the arguments which took place between Mr. Claughton and his wife could be called by that name.

The old man opened another letter; then, after some minutes of silence, he looked up and asked abruptly:

"Hardwicke, Hardwicke? Do you know that name, Cecilia?"

"No, dear Eustace. Yet stay," she added reflectingly, and passing her little plump white hand over her forehead as if to grasp an idea. "Yes, there are the Hardwickes of Farnwood Hall, L——shire people."

"H'm; good, really good county people?"

"Yes, of a very old family, I believe."

"Are they related to the O'Haras?"

"Not that I am aware of, dear Eustace."

"Humph, you are uncommonly chary of your information. Then, pray who the d—l are the O'Haras related to?"

"I do not know much about it, dear Eustace, really I do not," drawled his gentle spouse. "I fancy—let me see—I——"

"I don't care a d—— what you fancy; tell me how many sisters has or had Miss O'Hara?"

"Three, dear! Yes—no—yes, there must have been three."

"Are they all dead?"

"Yes, I believe so."

"Were they married or single?"

"Two must have been married, and one single; at least one was engaged to Sir Galbraith Carmichael; the other—I do not at all know whom she married."

"In short, you know nothing, as usual, Cecilia."

"Yes, so I told you, dear Eustace."

"Well, then, I'll tell you. One must have married a Hardwicke."

"One of the Hardwickes of Farnwood?"

"Why, that is just what I want to know."

Mr. Claughton rose and rang the bell impatiently; it was answered by an eminently respectable and slightly cadaverous-looking butler.

"Branksome," said the master, "bring me the first volume of Burke's 'Landed Gentry,' from the library table."

"Yes, sir."

Whilst the butler was absent on this errand, Mrs. Claughton ventured timidly to ask:

"And what does Slaney say, dear Eustace?"

"Eh, what?" returned her husband, hastily raising his shiny bald head. "Oh, ah, yes! Well, if you can have a little patience, you shall hear immediately."

A little patience! Had not poor Cecilia been continually exercising this virtue all the days of her twenty and odd years of married life? Unwise she may have been; very bright or clever she certainly was not; but ever patient, almost provokingly so, she never failed to be.

Branksome brought the desired volume and retired.

Mr. Claughton adjusted his double eyeglass on the bridge of his nose, opened the book, and having turned over two or three pages, exclaimed:

"Ah, here it is: 'Hardwicke of Farnwood Hall. John Robert, born 1773, married 1800 Jane Louisa, daughter of Sir Henry Worthington of Chumleigh Grange.' H'm, very good. Now for the issue: 'Henry Carleton, died young; Joanna Frances, unmarried; Roderick Barnard, in holy orders; James, married Edwina, third daughter of Lord Ferdinand Pomeroy.' That is all. There is nothing there that I want to know; confound it!"

The irate stockbroker closed the volume energetically, then rising, said:

"Well, perhaps Rutherford may know. I will write him a note at once."

As her husband gathered up his correspondence, prior to leaving the room, the yearning for news of her dearly loved son which filled Mrs. Claughton's motherly heart gave her courage to say:

"And Slaney's letter, dear Eustace?"

"How tiresome you are—there!" and throwing the coveted treasure at her, about as graciously as he might have thrown a bone to a hungry dog, Mr. Claughton stamped out of the room, slamming the door behind him.

His wife gently picked up the letter, and was soon so absorbed in its perusal that she forgot, for the time being, all about her husband's irritability and bearishness, to which, by-the-way, she was quite accustomed. Slaney's letter was short and to the point, as young men's letters home for the most part are. But this

one was of great moment for his mother, who fully realised the truth of the old saw which tells how a son is a son "till he marries a wife."

And this was what Slaney wrote:

"Hotel Victoria, Heidelberg,
"September, 185—.

"DEAR FATHER,

"I hope to reach home on Friday week; meanwhile let this prepare you for the intelligence which I hope to bring you of my engagement. I have been fortunate enough to meet with a pretty, charming unspoilt and unselfish girl, who, in short, is all I could wish my wife to be. And I have reason to hope she will not refuse me. You will be pleased to hear that the young lady to whom I am about to propose is Elsie Hardwicke, Miss O'Hara's niece. I remember that in a letter I received from you some weeks ago, you called my attention to the desirableness of cultivating the acquaintance of the latter, so feel no doubt as to your consent. I shall be able to tell you the rest when we meet. Now I am impatient to go and try my luck, so no more at present from your affectionate son,

"SLANEY CLAUGHTON."

"Dear Slaney! God grant he may have chosen well!" A few motherly tears at the thought of what a weighty step he was about to take, chased each other down Mrs. Claughton's soft pink cheeks, and fell on to her boy's letter. The happiness which she had not known in her married life, she found in the beloved only son on whom all her hopes were centred, and to whom she

had unwittingly transferred the first place in her affections. To her husband she patiently did her duty, though it was at best uphill work; but Slaney was the light of her eyes, the joy of her tired, weary heart. Therefore her thoughts naturally often dwelt on him, and many a fervent, mental prayer she addressed to the throne of grace for his safe-keeping amidst all this world's temptations. But she had no companion to whom she could pour out her heart and look for sympathy, and therefore she kept all these thoughts locked up in her heart. Clasping Slaney's letter with loving eagerness, she retired to her customary haven of refuge, a small morning-room, the furniture of which was old-fashioned and no longer very handsome; but Mrs. Claughton clung to it fondly, because it had been prepared for her under her husband's directions during the few happy days of her early married life, which formed the one bright spot in a long vista of sad years. There, on a small rose-wood table, stood a pretty inlaid workbox, a birthday gift from Mr. Claughton; on the marble mantelpiece was a teapot of old Chelsea china, on which a majestic Madame de Pompadour sat in state, flanked by sylvan groups of gay shepherds and *piquantes* shepherdesses. On a carved *étagère* surmounted by many a souvenir of Mrs. Claughton's girlhood, was placed the most precious link to that brighter past, when Eustace was still wont to remember the anniversary of her wedding-day, and kindly, if not caressingly, mark it by some pretty token. The keepsake I allude to was a miniature representing a dark-haired, blue-eyed, young man, with straight nose and rounded chin, dressed in the narrow-breasted coat and

high collar so familiar to us from the old portraits. It was not a very pleasant face, and had a stiff, unyouthful look about it, but was still far more amiable-looking than any truthful likeness of the hard-featured stockbroker could possibly be now, and therefore it was very dear to Mrs. Claughton.

In the sanctum just described, the neglected wife passed many lonely hours, seated working at a large piece of bead-work stretched on a frame; thinking thoughts little in keeping with the hues which composed her garlands.

Having safely secured the precious letter, she sat down in a low seat by the fire, and, resting her head on her dimpled hand, began to wonder what Elsie Hardwicke was like, and though half jealous of the woman who could captivate her son, ended by assuring herself that Slaney's choice could but be good.

Meanwhile her husband was also thinking of Slaney; he was very proud of his good-looking, gentleman-like son; whether he really loved him is a different question, which we could not decide upon without first occupying ourselves with the complicated inquiry whether natures like Mr. Claughton's are capable of real, unselfish love. As a rule it needs the cleansing fire of very heavy affliction to purge them of their selfishness; at other times they apparently feel no scruple in making all around them thoroughly miserable to gratify their slightest whim. Mr. Claughton was, as we know, most anxious to see his son well married, and, provided he was so, the sooner the better. Slaney was five-and-twenty, and his father deemed him quite old enough to be settled in life. The

young man had been educated at Eton and Christchurch; but had purposely been brought up to no profession, as his father wished him to settle in the country, whenever he married, and was able and desirous to buy an estate for him. The O'Haras were a very desirable connection, but who these Hardwickes were the stockbroker did not know; therefore, before answering Slaney's letter, he determined to consult his friend Colonel Rutherford, who was a man of the world, and knew everyone's family history who had one worth knowing. Accordingly a note was despatched to the colonel's club, begging him to pay Mr. Claughton a visit at his earliest convenience.

CHAPTER XII.

COLONEL RUTHERFORD.

COLONEL RUTHERFORD was out of town when the stockbroker's note reached his club; on his return, however, some days later, he at once called on Mr. Claughton. The old man received him cordially, and began by talking about the pictures which had arrived meanwhile. It was contrary to his habits ever at once to introduce the subject chiefly occupying his mind, even when addressing so old a friend as Percy Rutherford.

"Those sea pieces must go to make room. They are of no great value," said Mr. Claughton, as his friend carefully surveyed the large front drawing-room to see how the new acquisitions had best be hung. The room

had been recently arranged, and had a very light paper with gold panellings and cornices; the furniture and hangings were of light-blue satin; altogether Colonel Rutherford thought such surroundings very unsuitable for two of the pictures, which were old, and supposed, Mr. Claughton said, to be very valuable.

"This appears to me to be genuine," said the colonel, after a close scrutiny; "I think that head of the Madonna charming, and it certainly reminds me very much of Luini's style. It is really quite a gem, Claughton."

This appreciation of his son's purchase caused a momentary gleam of satisfaction to light up the stock-broker's hard features.

"That looks more doubtful to me," Colonel Rutherford continued, pointing to a scarcely finished, but exquisitely beautiful half length figure of the Saviour in the act of blessing the Cup; "still, it is very fine, too, very fine indeed. Where did Slaney pick them up? The lad must be quite a connoisseur."

"I think he has very good taste," answered Mr. Claughton proudly; "but I fancy he was not quite unassisted in this matter. In one of his letters he mentioned having heard through some private source that a Milanese picture-dealer had these paintings on sale, and at once offered the required price."

Eustace Claughton was not sorry to display how generously he supplied his son with money, and how thoroughly it was in his power to do so.

"Yes, I like that Madonna of Luini's immensely," said Colonel Rutherford emphatically, caressing his bushy brown beard, which care and perhaps art had

preserved intact from the grey marks of time. His tall, herculean form, measuring over six feet four inches in height, was still remarkably erect. The few hairs which adorned his head were disposed to the best advantage, and altogether he passed for a decidedly handsome man. Though rather vain, he was clever, kind-hearted, and ready to do anyone a good turn, which, from his vast amount of general information, he often found in his power. It was these qualities which had kept up his old friendship with the queer-tempered stockbroker, although the latter's whims occasionally put his faithfulness to a severe test. Colonel Rutherford had also taken a great fancy to Slaney, who had not inherited his father's hastiness, but rather combined his mother's gentle disposition with much common sense and many engaging ways which were quite his own. Had Percy Rutherford been aware how important his words that day would prove to his young friend, no doubt he would have been more careful of speech than he unfortunately proved to be.

"You don't appear satisfied about placing the pictures," said the stockbroker, when the colonel had relapsed into silence.

"Well, ahem—no; upon my word I don't know how they should be hung. The fact is, the paper is not very favourable."

"I know that. But then I only wish to show them to a few friends. I don't intend them to remain there. Perhaps when Slaney marries and settles, he will have them. It is time for him to settle down."

"Well, then, place them in the library. The light

is more favourable and the dark furniture less incongruous. Though not what is called a religious man, I don't like to see pictures on sacred subjects in a drawing-room. Those by old masters seem specially to want an old-fashioned hall and stained windows, or a diamond-paned casement."

"Well, I shouldn't mind buying some old family place and having it entailed on Slaney, if he marries well," said the stockbroker.

Colonel Rutherford was rather surprised at this second allusion to Slaney's possible marriage, but knowing well that it was impossible to force information out of Eustace Claughton, only said:

"This would be a favourable moment. There are two or three fine estates in the market just now. The Fentons' place, the Hollies; or the Saurins', Assherton Grange, might suit you." Then, changing the subject abruptly, he remarked: "Well, as we have settled where those two smaller pictures are to go, I am impatient to see the large modern one. You will be obliged to hang that in the front drawing-room; there would not be space enough anywhere else."

Mr. Claughton rang the bell. It was answered by Branksome, who, in obedience to his master's orders, went to summon another servant, whereupon the two together unpacked Vincent Hardwicke's large picture of the Heidelberg Castle courtyard, and submitted it to Colonel Rutherford's inspection.

The colonel gazed for some time with wrapt attention, almost with emotion, at the lovely moonlight colouring softening the rugged outline of the Otto Heinrichsbau, and casting blue-grey shadows on the

creeper-clad well-house. At length, as if awaking from a reverie, he turned to Mr. Claughton and said: "That is indeed a picture worth having. I was once at Heidelberg years ago, and remember just such a moonlight evening spent in the castle grounds. Ah me, *ces beaux jours sont passés*," and the colonel caressed his beard pensively.

Perhaps in the memory of that moonlight evening long ago may lie the reason why good-looking, popular Percy Rutherford had never married.

"The artist is rather the fashion just now, I believe," said Mr. Claughton, pompously. "I forget his name; in fact, I am not quite sure that Slaney told it me."

"Vincent Hardwicke, I see," said Colonel Rutherford, poising a double eyeglass on the bridge of his well-shaped nose.

A most unpleasant idea flashed through the stockbroker's mind. Could this . . . . ? No, impossible—and yet it must be! How could Slaney have been such a fool? However, Mr. Claughton could generally manage to curb his outbursts of passion, excepting where his wife was concerned, and so now he merely said quietly:

"Oh, Hardwicke! Do you know the name?"

"Hardwicke? Hardwicke?" reiterated his friend; "no, I don't—at least, not as a fashionable painter; and yet it does not seem quite unfamiliar to me. I dare say by-and-by I shall remember more about it."

After a little further discussion, the large picture was also hung to the tolerable satisfaction of Colonel Rutherford; and Eustace Claughton, hearing the lunch-

bell ring, suggested an adjournment to the dining-room.

Percy Rutherford had known Mrs. Claughton before her marriage: indeed, many people coupled his name with that of a very beautiful sister of hers, who had died of fever abroad; be this as it may, he certainly felt sorry for the neglected wife of his queer-tempered friend, and being always kind and courteous, his visits never failed to be a source of pleasure to her.

There was some conversation on general topics, and the colonel succeeded in making Mrs. Claughton laugh merrily at some well-told anecdotes. The stockbroker tried to make himself pleasant, secretly annoying his wife by a display of unusual devotion assumed for the edification of their guest, who, however, was not to be deceived.

At length the stockbroker said:

"Well, Rutherford, cannot you remember where you heard the name of Hardwicke?"

Mrs. Claughton glanced uneasily at her husband on hearing him ask this question; he had been in no very pleasant mood since the arrival of Slaney's letter, avoiding any direct reference to the subject of it, and only answering a timid inquiry of his wife's by a surly:

"We shall see. I must inquire about these Hardwickes."

In reply to his present question, Colonel Rutherford said:

"Well, no; really, I don't remember; but that is a fine painting you have, whoever the artist may be. I am sure you will be very pleased with it, Mrs.

Claughton," he added politely, turning towards his hostess.

"Have you seen the O'Haras lately, Rutherford?" asked Mr. Claughton, before his wife could find time to speak.

"No, not for years. I hear old Mike and his sister Patricia are abroad, adding to the number of British curiosities which we ship annually to the Continent. By Jove! that reminds me, of course, it was at the O'Haras I met a man called Hardwicke. Years and years ago, when I was quartered in Ireland, I spent a couple of nights at Ballygoran, and met an artist of that name there. He was not a bad fellow, though I did not care very much for the sketches he had made. He was laid up at Ballygoran with a sprained ankle. I wonder if it can be the man who painted your new picture? I heard afterwards he had had the impudence to propose to Conny O'Hara, and a very pretty little girl she was. But I can scarcely credit the report."

Mr. Claughton was silent, but looked daggers at his wife, as he always did when things went wrong.

Soon afterwards Colonel Rutherford rose and took leave, and if we would avoid being present at an unpleasant domestic scene, we had best likewise withdraw.

CHAPTER XIII.

MORE ILL LUCK.

WHEN Milton arrived in London, and betook himself to Morley's hotel, he found his father greatly improved in health and spirits, not to say in temper. Mr. Whitburn Corbin had received a kind welcome from several English gentlemen whom he had entertained at his handsome house in New York, and was on that particular evening to dine with a certain Sir Edmund Kelso, who begged him to bring his son, if he arrived in time; and wishing Milton should make good English acquaintances, he was very pleased at the latter's unexpected appearance. The poor boy had increased his cold on the road, but being anxious to keep his father in good humour, went dutifully to array himself in dress-coat and spotless white tie; during this process, however, he could not help casting many a regretful look at the bright fire and a certain many-coloured jacket laying on a chair, which he liked wearing when toasting over the grate, enjoying a comfortable smoke, and which had earned him the name of "little Joseph" among his sisters.

A very shy young lady had fallen to Milton's share at the dinner-party; as he was likewise bashful, the conversation did not prosper. Great was his relief, therefore, when the time came to fulfil the duty devolving on him of opening the door for the ladies; he now found himself next to a large-featured, pleasant-looking man with a long brown beard, who had greeted

his father particularly cordially, saying he had been most kind to him when on a visit to the United States some years before. The reader may, perhaps, have recognised Colonel Percy Rutherford, who in truth it was.

"Your father tells me you have been studying in Germany," said the colonel to Milton.

"I have been in Germany, sir," answered the latter, using the term of respect expected from all well brought up young men in America, when addressing their elders. "But I am not so sure about the amount of study I accomplished. Heidelberg possesses many pleasanter spots than the university lecture-room."

"Ah, you were at Heidelberg? Did you meet a young friend of mine there, named Claughton?"

"Yes, indeed," replied Milton, blushing profusely at the train of thoughts roused by Slaney's name. "He was a very pleasant fellow."

"Yes, and clever too. He sings rather well, and knows something about art."

"Too much," thought Milton.

"He sent home some valuable pictures to his father, whom I have known since we were both boys," continued Colonel Rutherford. "Amongst the paintings was a view of Heidelberg Castle, by a man called Hardwicke. Do you know him?"

"Yes, indeed, sir. I saw him quite often. He is the brother-in-law of an Irish lady of my acquaintance, Miss O'Hara."

"Oh, really! By Jove, then, he must be a man whom I met years ago in Ireland; he was very young then, and though supposed to have talent, as yet little

known as an artist. He was kept prisoner at the O'Haras' place, Ballygoran, for weeks, on account of a sprained ankle, and, at the end of the time, had the impudence to propose to his host's youngest daughter. I am very surprised to find Mr. O'Hara allowed the match to take place; it was not an agreeable connection for such a good old family. What is your opinion?"

"Well, you know, colonel, in the States we reckon a man at his own worth," interpolated Mr. Whitburn Corbin, who had been listening for some time to the conversation between his son and Colonel Rutherford.

"A very high-minded sentiment, no doubt," replied Colonel Rutherford; "but one which you will find jars against our British prejudices, as I am afraid my young friend, Slaney Claughton, is likely to find to his cost, if he lets his heart run away with his understanding."

Here Milton remarked:

"I suppose, sir, you allude to Mr. Claughton's engagement to Miss Hardwicke; does his father not approve of it?"

"H'm; no, he does not. But I am surprised at your having heard of it. Was it regularly given out at Heidelberg?"

"No, sir; but everybody believed it to be a fact."

"Well, between ourselves, our friend Slaney arrived at home two nights ago, and met with a warm, but not pleasant, reception. In short, his father gave him to understand that he must give up the idea of marrying Miss Hardwicke, or quit the premises not to re-enter them. Slaney chose the latter course, and has taken

rooms elsewhere. How all will end I don't know; nor do I see how he can marry; he has scarcely anything of his own, and has been accustomed to draw largely on his father, who will henceforth not give him a sixpence."

Here the conversation about the Claughtons ceased. It had roused many conflicting feelings in Milton's mind; he could not at once check a certain amount of satisfaction at hearing that his rival's path was bestrewed with thorns as well as his own, and it flashed through his mind that perhaps there might yet be a chance of success for him; then again he was not wholly destitute of compassion for Claughton, and felt convinced that, if placed in a similar position, such obstacles would only serve to urge him on to perseverance.

But unexpected circumstances were destined soon to drive these thoughts entirely out of his head, for, on returning to his hotel, he had a very violent fit of coughing, which kept on at intervals during the night, and put sleep out of the question. The doctor who was called in next day pronounced it to be inflammation of the lungs, and undoubtedly a serious case.

Milton's life hung for a long time on a thread; after many weeks, during which his recovery was almost despaired of, he was at length pronounced convalescent. As soon as he was capable of bearing the fatigue of the voyage, his anxious father took him back to New York, glad to delegate the responsibility of all further nursing and petting to two loving sisters.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN OBDURATE PARENT.

WE beat a hurried retreat from the Claughtons' house in Harley Street, for the purpose of avoiding being present at an angry encounter between its master and mistress; nor were we unwise in doing so. Scarcely had the dining-room door closed on Colonel Rutherford's manly figure than the storm burst forth, and the irascible stockbroker poured forth a torrent of abuse on his Cecilia's devoted head.

Otherwise deemed, as the world judges, a gentlemanlike and religious man, no feeling of piety or dignity restrained Eustace Claughton, when vexed, from interlarding and emphasising his remarks with profane utterances such as I do not feel disposed to repeat.

To be brief, Slaney had made a —— fool of himself by proposing to a beggarly artist's daughter, and of course no one was to blame but Cecilia. Who but the unfortunate scapegoat of a wife ever is in such a man's estimation? Cecilia had always praised the lad, and thought he could do no wrong; so he had turned out a conceited puppy, who would not listen to reason. If his mother had not known Miss O'Hara, Slaney might never have met the Hardwickes. Of course the father's memory was conveniently short on the subject of the many strong injunctions he had himself given Slaney to cultivate the old Irish lady's acquaintance. We may talk of women being illogical, and often with reason; yet do not men on occasions bear away the palm for being most unscrupulously so?

Mrs. Claughton entreated, remonstrated, and pleaded with "dear Eustace," but he remained implacable, and this scene ended, as such scenes always did, by the stockbroker leaving the room in a passion, and his wife creeping noiselessly away to her *boudoir* to weep and meditate.

How Slaney fared on reaching home we have already learnt from the lips of Colonel Percy Rutherford; as well as that he quitted his father's house at once, and took rooms for himself in the neighbourhood of Pall Mall.

And what was the result of this strange welcome home?

The one which is almost sure to ensue when a son who is desperately in love meets with opposition and harshness from his parents. Slaney determined more resolutely than ever to marry Elsie as soon as possible.

The artist and his daughter had arrived in London on the previous evening, and of course as yet knew nothing of the stockbroker's resentment, and Mr. Hardwicke had given his full consent to Elsie's engagement on the self-same day on which Slaney had despatched his letter to his father. Nothing could more thoroughly fall in with the little painter's wishes than that his daughter should be speedily and happily married to a young man with good prospects, and it also suited his temporary convenience, leaving him free to wander when and where his fancy led him.

Slaney called on the Hardwickes the morning after his ejection from home, and told of his father's violent opposition to the match. Mr. Hardwicke received the news sulkily, and seemed inclined at first to be fierce,

but on the whole took things more easily than the bearer of the evil tidings had dared to hope. The artist's plans were all made; he had decided to start for Africa as soon as the wedding was over. It would be very inconvenient if it did not take place, and Elsie remained on his hands. Thus this strange, crotchety man literally reasoned; nor was it unnatural that he should, for what he hated most was to be crossed in any whim or fancy on which he happened to have set his mind.

Certainly a hundred and fifty pounds a year were no sum to begin keeping house on, and this was all Slaney had of his own; but then Mr. Hardwicke would do something for his daughter, and the young man must get some employment. In his secret heart, the artist still cherished the hope that if only the stockbroker could be once prevailed upon to receive Elsie, her winning ways might cause him to relent. And therefore, though Mr. Claughton had still not retracted his prohibition to Slaney to cross his threshold, nor shown any other sign of reconciliation, three weeks after the Hardwickes' arrival in London, the wedding took place. It was solemnised in an unfashionable suburban church, without pomp or display of any kind. Instead of silk or satin, the pretty childlike bride wore a plain white merino dress. The fair, good-looking bridegroom likewise lacked the traditional, blue frock-coat; nor was there a gay throng of bridesmaids in attendance.

In addition to the bride's father, only one person stood near the happy pair; this was a tall man looking unmistakeably like a soldier, who, on reaching the

vestry after the ceremony, signed his name in the register as Percy Rutherford.

As the small party left the church, a forlorn-looking woman, draped in a long brown cloak, suddenly emerged from behind a pillar near the font, and coming forward to meet the bride, hurriedly lifted a long, thick veil and kissed her; then, before the latter could recover from her surprise, she turned to the bridegroom and clasped him in her arms, sobbing:

"God bless you, my own boy! my darling, darling Slaney!"

In another moment she was gone. Need we say this was Slaney's mother?

Almost immediately after the wedding, Mr. and Mrs. Slaney Claughton started with Vincent Hardwicke for Milan. They had decided to accompany him so far, because Slaney had come to the conclusion that he might, by studying for a while in the famous Milanese school of music, turn his fine voice to profitable account. Never having been accustomed to a sedentary life, he could not make up his mind to the drudgery of being tied to a desk, and some ill-paid clerkship was the only occupation he was likely to find in London. His father-in-law would also be able to introduce him to several artist friends in Milan, therefore it seemed altogether the wisest course to try his luck in that city.

Elsie, who had been so much abroad, was pleased at the prospect of exchanging London fogs for an Italian sky; and further, in her loving trustfulness, was ready to accede to any proposal made by him.

Having seen the young pair snugly settled in a

small but comfortable lodging in the old part of the town, charging his friend, Pietro Loretti, the picture-dealer, to look after them, Vincent Hardwicke quitted Milan and set forth on his travels. His farewell words to Elsie and Slaney were:

"You need not expect me till you see me."

CHAPTER XV.

AT MILAN.

THE first six months at Milan, passed very happily and quietly. Slaney studied hard at the cultivation of his voice, and added to their slender income by occasionally singing at concerts, loving his little wife tenderly and truly, and displaying a manly pride and energy in working for her sake. Elsie cheered him on with bright hopes for the future, looking up to him with loving trust and admiring his energy and manliness.

Connoisseurs talked of his becoming quite a star in the musical world, and there were even hopes held out to him of an engagement at the Scala, the great Milanese opera-house.

A letter written to his father just after his marriage had been returned unopened, accompanied by a few harsh lines disowning the connection, and saying that "Mrs. Claughton desired to do the same." Slaney had a slight touch of his father's temper, determined not to repeat the experiment, wrote no more letters to

either friends or relatives in England, and, after the manner of public singers, Italianized his name, calling himself Clautoni.

Owing to his necessary absence at his studies, Elsie generally spent her mornings alone with only Piccolo as a companion; but of an evening he would bring home artist friends, or take Elsie to a concert or the Scala. On Sundays they either went to the grand old cathedral, to which each visit seemed to attach them more and more, or else attended the vesper service at the quaint old church of St. Ambrose, where the holy man from whom it derives its name once closed the gates against his guilty sovereign Theodosius till he had atoned by public penance for his murderous deeds.

Elsie never tired of pacing those cloistered courts; for her constant wanderings amongst places rich in antiquarian interests, had filled her with a great love for frequenting spots where every stone, worn by the tread of endless generations of people of diverse creeds and degrees of faith, was a link in the chain of a great historic past.

On some occasions, too, Elsie had the joy and delight of sitting in some retired seat at a concert to listen to Slaney's rich voice, and feel her heart beat with rapturous pride when at the close of a song loud bursts of applause testified to the enthusiasm which her husband's singing had kindled in the sympathetic hearts of the Italians. It was no slight test of his powers for Slaney to be able thus thoroughly to enchant his audience and force them to get over their prejudice against the self-possessed, cold-looking *forestiere.*

The winter passed very pleasantly for Elsie and her husband; but when with spring the heat began, and the latter end of April brought the usual fortnight of incessant rain, Elsie's gipsy nature longed for country air and freedom from the town with the monotonous sight of nought but endless dripping roofs. Slaney was willing to do anything to please his "sunbeam," as he had laughingly pronounced her to be when the darkened skies seemed as if they would never send forth one ray of light again.

The necessary means for a long journey being wanting, it was decided that they should settle down in a pretty village called Rocaleto, about nine miles distant from Milan, where they could wait for Mr. Hardwicke, and whence Slaney could easily return for any stray concert which might chance to take place at that unfashionable season of the year.

At Rocaleto they took rooms in a rambling, two-storied house standing in a large, somewhat neglected-looking garden, where flags and stars of Bethlehem grew in unrestrained abundance amid the tall, rank grass. The house, like most in Italy, possessed a covered balcony or *loggia*, each arch of which was encircled with a sweetly perfumed frame of white jessamine. Here the Claughtons delighted in spending the summer evenings, and refreshing their eyes with the sight of orchards and vineyards, and watching the fireflies flitting like tiny wandering stars across the fields and meadows.

One close June evening they sat together; Elsie, who was still as childishly devoted to Piccolo as ever, tried to develop his talent for jumping by rich rewards

of sugar; and Slaney, finishing his supper, stopped now and then to watch his graceful young wife. Suddenly the sound of footsteps broke the stillness, a peaked brown beard became visible above the wicket-gate, and Elsie gave a shout of joy as a figure, shouldering a knapsack and staff in hand, entered the garden and came briskly along the path leading to the house.

"Hulloa, Elsie! hulloa Slaney, my boy!" said a gruff, familiar voice, and soon the artist felt two small, white hands clasped round his sunburnt neck, and Elsie's kisses on his weatherbeaten cheek.

"So you have come back again at last, my dear old daddie!" cried Elsie. "Well, you shall have the fatted calf killed for you, and not be allowed to run away again in a hurry."

Slaney took possession of the knapsack, Elsie clung to her father's arm, and soon the table in the *loggia* was re-spread with the best and most substantial food the house contained. The artist washed down a hearty supper with a bottle of foaming Asti, whilst Elsie and Slaney eagerly watched to supply all his wants, and related their experiences of the past months. At length Mr. Hardwicke laid down his knife and fork, and began in his turn to tell wonderful stories of his Abyssinian experiences, interviews with uncertain-tempered chiefs, black beauties who ogled and caressed him in hopes of being immortalised by his brush; nights spent in desert places, and days under a scorching sun. In short, though making full allowance for the embellishments frequently adorning travellers' tales in which his father-in-law delighted

to indulge, Slaney secretly rejoiced at having decided, if possible, to prevent Elsie roughing it in Abyssinia, and he could not refrain from bestowing an affectionate caress on his bright little "sunbeam."

The next day and the next, indeed, a whole week, were spent in similar pleasant intercourse, and then the artist's old restlessness began to show itself.

"By Jove, Slaney," he said one morning, as he lit his never-failing companion, the short brown pipe, preparatory to an after-breakfast smoke, "by Jove, Slaney, I cannot conceive how you have managed to vegetate so long in this out-of-the-way hole. I have sketched the old village church from three different points of view, and made studies of all the fine trees round, and now I really must have a change, and what is more, you must come too. We will begin by the Lake of Como."

"But Elsie——," said Slaney, hesitatingly.

"Why shouldn't she come too? It would not hurt her a bit. You coddle the child. Her mother was able to do twice as much."

Still Slaney shook his head; Elsie was not feeling strong, and being jolted along hard roads in some vehicle wholly innocent of springs, amid intense heat and clouds of dust, moving about each day from one inn to another, perhaps finding no means of conveyance but her own feet, were risks not to be thought of for one moment. Mr. Hardwicke partly felt the truth of this; but, with his usual selfishness, was chiefly vexed at his plans meeting with opposition, and, much to Slaney's annoyance, grumbled considerably about it to Elsie. The latter, though she would gladly

have pleased her father, felt she dared not encounter the risk of such fatigue; still, she felt sure a change from their monotonous life would be good for Slaney, though he was invariably good-tempered and contented, so the brave, cheery little "sunbeam" sought to conquer her fears, and said merrily:

"Go, of course, Slaney. Piccolo and I shall get on famously; it will not be the first time that he has taken care of me."

At length, after some demur on Slaney's part, and a great deal of persuasion from Elsie, the former decided to go, comforting himself and his wife with the thought that after all the separation would only last a fortnight.

The following morning the artist once more shouldered his knapsack and resumed his staff, sallying forth this time with his son-in-law. Elsie, followed by Piccolo, accompanied them to the end of the garden; her father bid her a gruff-toned but kindly good-bye, and Slaney, passing his arm lovingly round her waist, pressed a long, tender kiss on her brow, murmuring:

"Farewell, and God bless you, little sunbeam!"

Standing on tiptoe, Elsie peered over the creeper-clad fence, watching the pair till they were out of sight. Piccolo wagged his tail, whined, licked his mistress's hand, and rubbed his cold, black nose caressingly against it, as if to constitute himself forthwith her protector. With a little sob, Elsie at length turned away, and seizing Piccolo, buried her face in his long hair; when she raised her head, her eyes glistened

with tears. The good-natured landlady, Signora Pandolfini, came bustling along and said:

"Cheer up, *signora mia;* your good husband will be back before long, and you must keep a bright smile to welcome him. Now, come and see how pretty my little daughter Linda looks this morning, in the blue frock you made for her."

The dawning motherly instinct asserted itself, and soon Elsie was seated with roguish-looking Linda on her knee, laughing heartily at Giacomo, the eldest-born's efforts to blow soap-bubbles with an old clay pipe in the lather his mother had prepared for washing the clothes.

CHAPTER XVI.

SUMMER WANDERINGS.

THE artist and his son-in-law had been absent twelve days from Rocaleto. Hitherto the weather had been favourable, and Slaney had fished in the Lake of Como, whilst Mr. Hardwicke sketched; both to their respective hearts' content.

At midday the heat had been somewhat oppressive; but they had avoided crowded landings, and the halting-points of diligences, where travellers congregated; yet in those days the bustle and thronging were trifling in comparison to these times, when the railway brings multitudes of holiday-makers from Milan, and steamers pass almost unceasingly up and down the lake.

Our two wanderers had spent their mornings in

some shady spot, and their evenings in rowing lazily about the lake. Then five days had been devoted to an expedition up the Maloja Pass, and both men thoroughly enjoyed the varied and beautiful scenery; it was particularly fascinating to Slaney, who as yet knew nothing of the Alps.

Passing through Chiavenna, with its quaint, many-windowed ruin, and slopes rich in vineyards, where all things still bore a distinctly southern aspect, they ascended past babbling brooks and rushing torrents, amid sweet-scented pine-woods, to where yellow potentillas, pure white grass of Parnassus, and deep blue gentians grew together on the mountain-side, whilst snow-clad peaks stood out in rugged grandeur against the cloudless sky.

At length, after endless turnings and windings, clambering and much perseverance, they reached the hospice at the summit of the pass, which stood bare and solitary but for the few clusters of forget-me-nots and alpine rhododendron which covered the barren rock here and there. Bright, hardy flowers, surely theirs was no unenviable lot, to cheer the way, and gladden the eyes of the self-denying band who dwelt on those isolated heights.

Leaving the hospice and wending their way through the valley of the Upper Engadine, the travel-stained pedestrians found themselves in a little world complete in itself, 6,000 feet above the sea-level.

Green lakes overshadowed by spectre chains of glaciers, forest glades carpeted with flowers and moss, and quiet hamlets not as yet disfigured by monster barrack-like hotels; this was what they saw. Slaney

thought it would be perfection, were Elsie only at his side to enjoy it with him.

But at length all this delightful scenery had been left behind, and on the twelfth day of their departure from Rocaleto we find them in the little town of Como. Dark, ominous clouds covered the sky on their return the night before, and now they were spending a hopelessly wet day at a very primitive inn.

Patter, patter, patter, went the rain, mixing with the supply of dust on the window-panes, and trickling down in muddy streamlets, making it difficult to see through them. For upwards of half an hour Slaney had been hopelessly gazing out into the narrow, deserted street, during which time he had seen but one forlorn-looking *contadina*, struggling with a big basket and a large, red-cotton umbrella which threatened every moment to turn inside out. No other human being was visible, only a forlorn-looking cur which slunk along with its tail turned in, as if ashamed to be out in such weather. In short, Slaney was vividly experiencing that trying to kill time is worse than the hardest toil.

Mr. Hardwicke's short pipe had been filled and refilled repeatedly; so had the handsomely carved meerschaum, Elsie's first love-gift to her betrothed at Heidelberg.

Both father and son-in-law had studied the shabby, well-thumbed strangers' book again and again without even having the satisfaction of finding that some one they so much as knew by name had been similarly located. Slaney, having given up all hopes of seeing any more passers-by, began to exercise his Italian on

the small supply of newspapers the inn afforded; these were soon perused, and then he sauntered round the room inspecting the woodcuts on the wall; they were very original and striking representations of different scenes in the Prodigal Son's history, in which powdered ladies in flounces and hoops, and gentlemen wearing tail-coats and knee-breeches, abounded; the very gay-looking Prodigal was conspicuous by the huge dimensions of his frill and pig-tail.

Whilst making this tour of inspection, Slaney's eyes happened to light on an old copy of the *Times*, left there a few weeks before by some chance English traveller.

The young man took up the paper and began reading; suddenly he exclaimed:

"Why, I did not even know she was dead, and yet she must be, for here is a copy of her will——"

"Of whose will?" inquired the artist.

"Why, your sister-in-law, Patricia's."

"Pattie's?"

"Yes, listen: 'the will of Miss Patricia O'Hara, of Ballygoran, who died on the 21st of March, at Madrid.' I thought she had not written to Elsie for an age. It is dated the 10th of April, 1850, and she leaves everything to her brother Michael, the lucky old beggar!"

"By Jove, that is a piece of ill-luck; but you see she made her will before she had ever seen Elsie. A legacy would not have been ill-timed just now, eh, my boy? By-and-by there may be more mouths to feed," and Mr. Hardwicke gave one of his gruff chuckles.

"Yes, a windfall would be very acceptable; but what I care more about is that Elsie will fret. She

took a fancy to the old lady, and has such a tender heart; besides, she made my acquaintance through Miss O'Hara," said Slaney, with a rather self-complacent look.

"So the old woman is gone. I wonder what has become of her dog and all the birds; is no mention made of them in the will? Probably they all went two and two to the funeral; I am glad she did not leave them to Elsie," said the artist, trying to be facetious.

This was all the effect produced on the two men by the news of that important personage, Miss O'Hara, being dead. She was regretted by few, like most of those who, whilst perhaps really possessed of kindly feelings, hide their better qualities beneath a cloak of fussiness and parade which has become a second nature to them. Indeed, the decease of such persons must necessarily bring a feeling of relief to those, in whom daily suffering from their little stings and frettings has effaced the memory of the very rare occasions, on which they have dropped their repelling disguise and shown that they too had hearts of flesh.

Towards evening the landlord announced that a *vetturino* would be at the disposal of the *signori* for a small sum, if they cared to avail themselves of it to return to Rocaleto. As the rain did not appear likely to cease, and Como had no attractions in such weather, the artist and his son-in-law closed willingly with the *padrone's* offer. Halting the first and second nights at small hamlets, they reached Rocaleto late in the afternoon of the third day.

CHAPTER XVII.

POOR LITTLE "SUNBEAM."

THE days passed more quickly than Elsie dared hope at first. She often longed for Slaney, but the kind, motherly *padrona's* encouraging smiles, Baby Linda's cooing and caresses, and little brown-eyed Giacomo's roguish looks as he pattered, with his plump little bare feet, along the red-tiled floor, to meet *la bella signora*, not to forget Piccolo's devotion, all served to cheer her. Then she would take her work into the *loggia* and make endless stitches in diverse tiny garments, often smiling to herself as she thought how some day she might have a brown or blue-eyed little one, as merry as little Giacomo, only, of course, ten thousand times more dear, running to meet her and lisping "Mamma!" and how proud Slaney would be of it!

In this way she tried to pass the time, though sometimes, despite of everything, a sense of loneliness would steal over her, and then she chid herself as foolish, knowing Slaney "only went to please papa," and because he knew his father-in-law would not go alone, but fret and fume, and vex his "little sunbeam." Then she reassured herself by adding mentally that all would be right if her husband were only back in four weeks.

On the same day on which Vincent Hardwicke and Slaney returned to Como, from their trip to the Engadine, Elsie received an unexpected visit from an old acquaintance of her father's, Mr. Dawson, whom she

and her husband had met at Milan, and who had promised to pay them a flying visit on his return from Switzerland. Mr. Dawson was a clergyman, and had spent many years in India as a missionary; continued ill-health having brought him to Europe for rest, he had made up his mind to try what a long holiday and frequent change of scene would do for him. He was a thoroughly conscientious man, and glad whenever an opportunity occurred for doing good; for, as he expressed it, he never considered himself "quite off duty."

"So you are alone, Mrs. Claughton?" he asked, a kindly smile lighting up his wizen, parchment-like cheeks, and adding additional gentleness to his sympathising blue eyes. "But I hope it will not be for long. If there is a chance of Mr. Claughton being back soon, I will give my old bones a few days' rest, and take up my abode at the village inn, as the host is eager I should do. I should be sorry to miss an opportunity of seeing your husband."

"I cannot say exactly when Slaney will be back, Mr. Dawson; but he talked of taking a fortnight's tour, and this is the eleventh day. I am sure he will be very pleased if you will wait to see him, and so will my father, who has gone with him. Papa, you know, says you are the only clergyman he ever took a fancy to," said Elsie, simply.

In this wise it came to pass that the kind-hearted old man, who secretly grieved to see the anxious look in the young wife's face, settled down at the Corona to await her husband's return.

On the two succeeding afternoons, Elsie and Piccolo,

accompanied by Mr. Dawson, walked through the village to where four roads crossed, and, seating themselves on a roughly-hewn bench beneath the shadow of a large mulberry-tree, watched and waited in hopes of seeing the two travellers.

The first evening brought no tidings, the second likewise, and Elsie's face wore a look of deep disappointment, though she kept repeating that the fortnight would not expire till the following day.

The first week she had heard twice from Slaney—long, loving letters, full of tender thoughts, and expressing the hope of returning speedily; she knew he was contemplating a trip to the Engadine, and that letters might easily be delayed in those out-of-the-way parts. But when will anxiety be set at rest by reasoning, however logical?

Mr. Dawson needed no telling to read Elsie's thoughts; and on that second evening, as they retraced their steps, stopping at the gate to bid Elsie good-night, he took her little dimpled hands and held them gently for a moment between his own, saying:

"Till to-morrow, then; you may feel sure they will come to-morrow."

To-morrow!

How little hold we creatures of to-day have on it, is a thought which has been moralised on, in verse and prose, till people deem it a mere truism; and yet it still remains a deep truth on which some, oppressed by a heavy burthen, rest all their hope, and which should wring from others, in the hour of wealth, a "*Miserere Domine.*"

When about to ascend the broad flight of stone steps

leading to the *loggia*, Elsie heard a cry which she recognised as little Giacomo's voice, and, being anxious to learn what had befallen her usually merry favourite, turned her steps towards the kitchen. On entering, she beheld him perched on a very unsteady chair, and leaning over the open fire-place to peer into a large saucepan full of *polenta*,* which was to form the evening meal. Into this the child had accidentally thrown an old indiarubber ball, which he dearly loved, and therefore screamed lustily, while the tears ran down his cheeks.

Fearing he might lose his balance and be burnt, or scalded, Elsie called gently to him, and, turning his head round, he smiled at her amidst his tears. But when she went closer, to find out what he was about, he suddenly threw open his arms and clung to her with all his might; the chair was upset in an instant, and, of course, Giacomo with it, dragging down Elsie and the saucepan in his fall.

Good Mistress Pandolfini, with little Linda in her arms, was gazing over the fence at the back of the house when Elsie returned from her walk. The *padrona* had only intended to have five minutes' chat with her neighbour, the baker's wife; but the minutes soon spun themselves into a quarter of an hour, and, amid the excitement of going over all the village gossip, the worthy Teresa never observed that little Giacomo, who had at first clung tightly to her side, held fast by the promise of some nice yellow plums, had finally felt neglected and wandered away. When at length the last good-night had been exchanged, and Signora Pan-

* A dish made with the meal of the Indian corn or chestnuts.

dolfini returned to see what had become of that little rogue Giacomo, she was surprised at being met by Piccolo, who whined and began to pull at her dress with his teeth. Too soon Teresa knew the truth; for, on entering the kitchen, she beheld Elsie lying pale and still on the ground, and the now empty saucepan next to her. Little Giacomo, with a bruise on his soot-besmeared forehead, was patting the poor lady's white face with his grimy hands, and saying in the most piteous accents:

"Wake! wake! *bella Signora!*" But no response came from Elsie's lips.

"Oh, *Signor Iddio,* she is dead! And what will the poor husband do when he comes home, and his young wife does not run to meet him?"

Signora Pandolfini clasped her hands over her head in despair, then seized hold of her boy, and with a kiss and a shake set him upon his legs:

"Run quickly to the gate, *Giacomo mio,*" she cried, "and see if father is coming home from work, and if thou dost not see him, hie thee as fast as thy little legs will carry thee to the workshop, and bid him hasten home."

Fright had dried the child's tears, and he obeyed his mother's order unhesitatingly.

Carlo Pandolfini was a well-to-do carpenter, and diligent in attending to the affairs of his calling. The angelus bell had warned him that it was time to leave off work, and he had just dismissed his men and was turning down his shirt-sleeves over his muscular arms before going home, when Giacomo entered with a very sad face, and gasped out:

'Please father, come, come! *Oh, la bella signora, la bella signora!*"

Carlo lifted Giacomo up on to his shoulder, the child nestled confidingly close to him, and threw one chubby arm round his neck, burying the other hand in his bushy black beard. A few rapid strides brought the carpenter home, and into the kitchen, where he found his wife trying amid many lamentations to restore Elsie to consciousness; but as yet without success. Setting his boy down on the ground, Carlo took up the slight figure in his arms with almost womanly tenderness, carried it upstairs to the Claughtons' neat little room, and laid it on the lavender-scented bed.

"Now stay by her, whilst I run for the doctor, Teresa," he said to his wife, who had followed him upstairs; "and do not grieve so, my good woman; if the poor young thing wakes it will fret her, and can do thee no good."

Then out he stepped gently as he came only stopping for a moment below to lift a warning finger to his little son, and say:

"*Zitto, zitto,* hush—hush! Keep quiet, *Giacomo mio,* or thou wilt make the *bella signora* worse."

And little Giacomo crept away into a corner, and was as still as a mouse till his mother came to find him to put him to bed, when of his own accord he added a little clause to his evening prayer, to beg the Madonna to wake the *bella signora,* and let her speak to him again.

The doctor was fortunately a sensible, middle-aged man, above the usual run of village quacks, and in a

very short time he and a kindly peasant woman, not unskilled in nursing, found themselves at Casa Pandolfini.

The doctor looked grave, but held out hopes of perhaps saving the poor lady's life; still, the case was an extremely difficult one. Fortunately the saucepan had not been long enough on the fire for the *polenta* to be very hot, and so Elsie was not scalded; yet, the shock had been severe, and her arm was injured.

It had been a night of anxious watching for the poor *padrona*, who had thought the morning would never come; but at length day dawned, and with it a new life came into existence. Was it to be at the cost of one being cut short?

Elsie had been conscious for a time, but lay back in her pillows looking wan and listless—utterly indifferent to everything going on around her; only when a feeble cry reached her ear, proceeding apparently from a bundle of flannel in Signora Pandolfini's arms, she gave a faint smile, and made an effort to stretch out her hand.

Alas! at dawn, that grey, chilly, most disquieting of times to every watcher by a sick-bed, when hopelessness engendered of weariness takes possession of the soul, and the lingering shadows seem as if they never would be dispelled, the fiat had gone forth.

"I cannot save the mother, but I hope to save the child. Is there no one the poor young signora knows, for whom you could send? No one within reach, I mean?" inquired Doctor Lippi.

"Only an old gentleman, who arrived at the *albergo**

* An inn.

two nights since. The signora told me that he knew both her husband and father," replied the padrona.

"He had better be informed of the sad occurrence," returned the doctor.

"As you think proper. But would it not be better first to have the child baptized by Father Antonio? The mother, poor thing, is of course a heretic, and I fear it is too late to try and save her soul; we can but trust to the good God to pardon her ignorance. But the innocent babe might be snatched from the jaws of Satan."

Here the worthy woman crossed herself, devoutly adding:

"And the sooner it is done the better, for it is but a poor puny thing, and may perhaps not live."

"That is all very true. Yet why should you not send for Signor Clautoni's friend?" inquired Dr. Lippi.

"Ah well, there is just the hitch. The signora told me he was one of the leaders of a sect to which most of the *Inglesi* belong. Poor young thing, she seemed to see no harm in it," added the padrona, with a shudder, "but then of course that is the way she has been brought up, which makes it all the more necessary the little one should be baptised in the true faith. You know Father Antonio says the saving of a soul covers a multitude of sins."

The doctor listened patiently to this discourse, but, as he was not so zealous for proselytes, offered no comment thereon; only at its conclusion he remarked quietly:

"Still, I would send for the English gentleman first, or Signor Clautoni might be angry."

The carpenter agreed with Dr. Lippi, and accordingly Mr. Dawson was sent for, and came at once. He was greatly shocked to hear of the sad event, and asked if he might see Elsie, adding:

"I am a minister of religion."

"Not a priest of Holy Church?" asked the padrona.

"Not of your church, but still a priest of the Church of Christ," answered the old man, gently and reverently.

Signora Pandolfini shook her head incredulously, and looked inclined to argue the point, but her husband, who was a bit of a character, and far more liberal-minded than the general run of villagers, said:

"Let it be, wife. It is wrong to disturb the faith of the dying, and the good gentleman cannot be of Satan, or he could not speak the name of the dear Lord Christ so lovingly. Let him pray by the poor lady, and who knows but that God may hear his prayers?"

Without further remonstrance, Teresa ushered Mr. Dawson into the young mother's presence.

Elsie did not take any notice, and for a while he knelt in silent prayer at her side. At length she appeared to recognise him, and attempted to speak. The words came slowly, and with difficulty:

"My baby . . . . christen . . . . my baby;" then after another pause: "before . . . ."

The sentence remained unfinished.

Mr. Dawson understood; he felt that the dying mother yearned to see her little lamb received into the True Shepherd's flock ere she herself, sustained by that same loving Guide, passed through death's

dark valley. Therefore the old man signed acquiescence, and desired the infant might be brought to him, and the few necessary arrangements made for the sacred rite. It then struck him that he really did not remember Mrs. Claughton's Christian name, and yet some name the babe must have, and it would have seemed natural to give it its mother's.

Elsie had sunk back into a state of semi-unconsciousness, and took no notice beyond one faint smile of his repeated efforts to ascertain her wishes on the subject; finally, in his despair, he turned to the padrona for advice. She was no better informed, but ended by offering to stand godmother herself, not without some vague feeling that it would be good for the little heretic to be named after a good Christian.

In this wise it came to pass that the poor babe, who was never to know the sweetness of maternal tenderness, nor nestle into a mother's loving arms, was named Teresa.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE RETURN.

SOME hours after the circumstances just related had taken place in the little room leading on to the *loggia* of Casa Pandolfini, the sound of wheels was heard along the usually silent road. A carriage stopped at the gate, and out of it stepped Slaney and Mr. Hardwicke. Carlo, who had just come in from his workshop to see how matters were proceeding, was waiting

for his wife's report, and passing the time in weeding a small potato plot. Hearing the sound of wheels, he laid down his hoe and came forward to meet the new-comers. His heart sank as he saw the two gentlemen enter, and both cast inquiring glances up at the deserted *loggia*, in hopes of discerning a pair of bright, blue eyes keeping eager watch there.

Carlo was, as has been said, a very superior man; though born at Rocaleto, he had been early sent to school at Milan, and might have driven a thriving trade there as joiner, but his father dying soon after he had reached man's estate, left him the old homestead; therefore he determined to marry his Teresa at once, and settle down at home. His betrothed was a Tessin girl, who had gone to service at Milan, but hated town life, and longed to get back to the freedom of the country again. Such was the carpenter's history, and he had become quite an important personage at Rocaleto, and was often referred to by neighbours in difficulties. On the present occasion he felt it would devolve on him to break the news to the poor young signora's husband, and had been turning over in his mind how it would be most suitably done. But on seeing the glance of inquiry in Slaney's face give way to one of bitter disappointment, all he had intended to say went out of his head, and a choking sensation in his throat prevented his doing more than gasp forth:

"*O povero signore! povero signore!*"

Slaney saw at once that something very serious must be amiss; and turning to his father-in-law, who was settling with the coachman, said hurriedly:

"Something has gone wrong with Elsie, I am sure;" then hastened into the house; he was quickly followed by Mr. Hardwicke.

At the head of the staircase leading on to the *loggia* Mr. Dawson met them. Slaney scarcely showed any surprise at his being there; he was too pre-occupied to be astonished at anything. The clergyman drew him gently aside into a room at the opposite end of the passage to where Elsie lay, and signing to Hardwicke to enter, closed the door softly. Then, in a few simple earnest words, he told the sad news to the anxious husband and father. The older man gave way to almost angry grief; the younger one seemed completely stunned by the blow.

Perhaps there is nothing harder, amongst the difficulties befalling a bearer of evil tidings, than to have to break them to men. Most women have to learn the lesson of patient submission early, and by slow degrees, and thus their minds are more prepared to bear greater afflictions; besides, they can almost always take refuge in tears. Men are not thus brought face face with the minor trials of daily life, and so, for want of the gradual preparation, are doubly bowed down by a sudden, heavy blow.

Mr. Dawson performed his sad duty bravely, and when the first agony of grief had worn away, urged on Slaney the necessity for self-command, if he wished to have the comfort of seeing Elsie once more; for her young life was fast ebbing away.

When the sorrowful husband entered the room, the last dying rays of sunshine rested like an aureole on the head of her who lay so still and pale upon the bed.

Elsie had been seemingly unconscious for more than an hour; but as if made aware of Slaney's presence, she opened her eyes as he came in, and stretched out a hand already growing cold in the icy grasp of death. Her husband drew the little hand lovingly towards him, and, smothering it with kisses, let it rest in his. No word was spoken, save that Elsie once murmured, almost inaudibly:

"My Slaney!"

Poor little "sunbeam," or rather poor Slaney, for Elsie was going home, whilst he had yet to face life bereft of sunshine for many a day.

Vincent Hardwicke had at length mastered the violence of his grief sufficiently to enter into his dying daughter's presence; slipping softly in, he heard her gentle voice breathe the words:

"My Slaney!"

Then all was still.

Night drew near; the earth was passing through darkness to the dawn of another day, and a human soul was winging its flight through the grey shadows to the eternal light beyond.

* * * * * *

Ere three days had passed away, Elsie was laid to rest in a little out-of-the-way corner of the village churchyard, removed as far as possible from the graves of the children of the "true faith," for so the Romish Church demanded; but the flowerets and sunshine, unlearned in a diversity of creeds, made their home in the isolated spot as impartially as where the remains of the faithful were interred.

And now what were Slaney and his father-in-law

to do? Two men left to take care of a delicate baby, and with no lady friend to help them in their trouble!

Slaney looked sorely puzzled how to handle the infant, when the good *padrona* met him on the return from the funeral, and placed it in his arms. He yearned over, and longed to take care of, and cherish it as a precious trust from his darling. Meanwhile the little creature began to wriggle, and move about its claw-like fingers in a strange fashion, finishing up with a scream, which left no doubt as to the soundness of its lungs; the father gave it back to Signora Pandolfini in despair.

The first thing to be thought of was how to procure a trustworthy nurse; fortunately the quickwitted *padrona* was ready with a suggestion. Her sister Lucia, who had married the blacksmith at the neighbouring village of San Martino, had just lost her own child, and would willingly, she felt sure, take a mother's place to little Teresina. Lucia was communicated with, and, expressing her readiness to close with the offer, the precious infant was confided to her charge.

Signora Pandolfini had been at Milan in the service of Mr. Hardwicke's old friend Loretti, the picture-dealer; when she married, Lucia had taken her place till the latter's turn also came to enter the bonds of matrimony. Both sisters were therefore personally known to Signor Loretti, who thought well of them, and advised Slaney to confide his child to Lucia Suzzara's care for the present. So Elsie's baby was taken to San Martino, and managed to survive all the swaddling and messing foreign infants are subjected to; in fact, she appeared to thrive thereon.

"Slaney, my boy, it is no use staying moping here," said Mr. Hardwicke, when the arrangements for putting his grandchild out to nurse had been satisfactorily concluded. "Loretti will occasionally come down and look after the baby, and he can send Lucia the monthly payment, and write us word from time to time how the little one is thriving. I must be off in search of fresh subjects for my brush, and you had better go with me. It will be the best thing for you; in fact, you must come. You can be back in good time before the concert season begins. We will start for Milan to-morrow and sleep at Loretti's house; once there we can finally decide on our movements. We might begin by Venice."

Slaney could only submit. His grief was yet too fresh for it to make much difference to him where he was or what he did.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

THE STOCKBROKER.

As has been said, Mr. Claughton senior was most anxious to make himself and his family appear to advantage in the world's eyes; he was therefore very punctilious about appearing to fulfil every social and domestic duty expected of a good citizen and master of a household. Two things above all he never left undone, flattering himself he thereby managed to do

his duty to his Creator and satisfactorily to invest a portion of the unrighteous mammon to the furthering of his heavenly interests. First, he never omitted to put down in full the name of Eustace Slaney Trevelyan Claughton with a handsome donation on every public subscription list for benevolent purposes, which happened to possess a goodly array of titled patrons; then he was most strict in the regularity with which he attended public worship twice every Sunday at a fashionable neighbouring church. This sacred building had for many years been in the hands of a worthy, humdrum old gentleman, who considered his duties amply fulfilled by preaching two flowery sermons once a week. In each discourse, averaging three quarters of an hour in length, he told his brethren regularly they were miserable sinners; but seemed gracefully to accept the fact, never getting any further. Apparently it never entered the good man's head to throw out any practical suggestion to his congregation on amendment of life, or to bring before them the various lessons our Church's year is intended to teach.

But of late fresh life was stirring amongst the worshippers at St. Peter's; the old incumbent had been gathered to his fathers, and the new one, the Reverend Francis Power, was most hardworking. He told the flock committed to his charge deep truths in simple language and with a reality of feeling which brought the lessons home to their consciences.

Mr. Power's ministrations had begun in Advent, when his solemn appeals to his hearers to rise from a life of luxurious ease to one of active self-denial, bore much good fruit; though at first his fashionable con-

gregation felt rather startled at the new style of preaching. And so from Christmas to the glad Epiphany, and from thence to Lent, the new incumbent led them on, never failing to point out what each period as it came ought to mean to them, and showing his love to his Master by faithfully setting forth the grand doctrines of the Church He had founded.

Francis Power truly valued his privileges as a clergyman, and was most reverent in conducting the services of the sanctuary. An ornate ritual was not to his mind, nor did he believe it more desirable to add to the rubric than to take away from it; but, like the large-hearted man that he was, he did not speak disparagingly of others who sought to honour the Church's crowning act of worship by more outward display. Nor was he of those who, whilst ready enough to sneer at "ecclesiastical millinery," inconsistently make a break in the service to be pompously conducted by a verger to the vestry, thence to emerge in a flowing black gown, a remnant of the monkish, middle ages. No: the new incumbent preached in the plain cassock and surplice which he wore at all ministrations; and thus we find him standing in the pulpit on the particular Sunday evening in Lent, on which we, too, would enter his church as listeners.

At the beginning of the penitential season he had announced his intention of preaching a course of sermons on almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. He was now occupied with the first portion of his subject, and had chosen his text from St. Matthew's Gospel. Having drawn his hearers' attention to the fact of

"almsgiving" being also rendered as "righteousness" in the Bible margin, he begged them to pause a moment and consider in how wide a sense the words might be taken.

"Not only in giving to the poor, brethren, but by every deed of mercy; every act of kindness, every assistance given to the sick and needy, every lightening of the burden of the widow and orphan, we do our alms.

"Each time we seek to strengthen the wavering or raise the fallen, each occasion on which we use gentle means instead of fighting for our due, we do works of righteousness in the way the Saviour would have us perform them. And are not such deeds alms in a higher, more Christ-like, sense than those of the purse-proud man, who, with much self-satisfaction, puts his gold piece into the open plate at church, or subscribes largely to the fashionably-promoted charity, to be seen of men?

"Brethren, I can have no doubt that they are so. Mark well the condition which the dear Son of God declares to be the indispensable characteristic of all almsgiving, as opposed to pharisaicalism. It is unostentation. It is secrecy. I do not undervalue the good done on many occasions by public subscriptions, and influential names heading the list may be a guarantee to others for some good work to which they would otherwise have hesitated to contribute. But still we may feel sure, we are always safest the closer we follow the example of Him who 'fulfilled all righteousness.' Now, if we look at Him, we shall find no display, no ostentation, only great

humility; doing good, not in the palace and crowded market-place, but in the lowly home, by the wayside, in the desert, amongst publicans and sinners.

"Therefore, whilst always gladly furthering every good work according to our abilities, let us prefer to seek out those opportunities where no eye but that of our heavenly Father seeth us.

"Whilst giving away large sums where we thought our position in society required it, may we not have neglected some relative, friend, or dependant too diffident to ask our bounty? May we not have refused the entreaty of some humble but deserving applicant, or been hard on some one who was in our debt? Or, again, have we been unjust in the way in which we have made our wills, and provided for our children? And why was this? Was it because our wishes had been thwarted, or from worldliness, or selfishness? Brethren, put these questions each to yourselves, and rest not till they are answered!"

After a few more practical words on the exercise of self-denial in all things being absolutely necessary for those who would seek to follow their Master through the days of His temptation, the preacher concluded. His words must have fallen strangely on the ears of some of the rich city men, who formed a large part of his congregation. Probably not very many thought almsgiving could imply anything else but that necessary charity which it was so eminently respectable to come forward with. And some heard and admired, and went away to forget, as the cares of this world put in their claim for a hearing. Others may have searched deeper into their hearts, and acted on the

idea suggested to them; but the only person with whom we are now concerned is old Mr. Claughton, who is seated in the corner of one of those well-cushioned, high-backed far too cosy pews, whose days Mr. Power inwardly hopes are numbered.

The stockbroker sits perfectly stiff and erect, his fore-arm resting on the top of the pew-door, and his eyes are riveted on the preacher. Only now and then he passes his hand caressingly over his smooth-shaven chin, or gently strokes his neatly clipped whiskers. In doing this he displays the heavy signet-ring on his finger, at which he so often gazed with satisfaction in former days, because it reminded him of his fondly-cherished scheme of restoring the honour of the good old name in his son. Now, the uplifted gauntlet waving on to victory, with the motto *espérons toujours*, only serves to remind him of disappointed hopes. In a worldly point of view it is well with him: the riches on which he has set his heart have increased; yet if we scan his countenance more narrowly by the light of a gas-jet falling full upon him, we shall trace lines of bitter disappointment and care in his furrowed face. He is a very wealthy man; he has also begun to feel a very lonely one. In the past autumn his gentle wife had died. She had been neither very helpful nor very wise, yet faithful and ever ready to be a peace-maker, though all her entreaties on Slaney's behalf had been of no avail.

Owing to her death, the past Christmas had been the first spent by the stockbroker in complete solitude; having set to work early in life to carve out his own fortunes, he had rarely come in contact with the

rest of his family, nor had he cared to keep up an intimacy even with his brother. He looked upon relatives as so many possible drags on his purse, and as such to be avoided. Helping them might hinder his ambitious plans. This particular year, when the feast of peace and goodwill returned again, only bringing greetings from a few people who expected mple remuneration in return for their civility, a feeling of loneliness crept over him.

As he sat in lonely state in his dining-room over a glass of port, after a not very successful attempt to eat his duty slice of turkey, he keenly felt the loss of his patient wife; also, though he would not have owned it, the thought would come that it might be pleasanter to see Slaney's frank, good-looking face opposite him instead of only the solemn-looking countenances of the men-servants. Slowly and wearily the evening passed, bringing the sense of his loneliness very keenly before him; and the remembrance of its dreariness increased the void in his heart, and perhaps softened him a little,

As the days grew longer he only grew sadder; had he not of his own act shut out hope from his heart? Slaney's first letter had been returned unopened; for months no other had come. Only nearly a year afterwards a second arrived, bearing the Venice post-mark. This time the envelope had a deep black edge; and for a moment he was half-tempted to break the seal and learn for whom his son was mourning; but, because Mrs. Claughton was present, her amiable husband, feeling sure she recognised the writing, threw the letter angrily into the fire. A slight crackling, a

bright flicker, and Eustace Claughton had done what no amount of repentance could remedy.

Nearly eleven years have passed since then, leaving the stockbroker a careworn, disappointed man; and so we found him on the particular Sunday evening in question seated in his pew at St. Peter's Church. He prided himself on being a good judge of a sermon, and the new incumbent interested him. He felt a certain amount of enjoyment in listening to noble sentiments, though the idea of it being part of his duty to attempt to put them into practice rarely occurred to him. Imperceptibly, however, Mr. Power's direct teaching made some impression; for much to his surprise, some of the ideas he heard on Sundays would suggest themselves again and again during the week.

The sermon on almsgiving specially impressed him; some parts of it touched a sore place in his heart, and made him ask himself, on his way home from church, if there had not been a time in his life when he had harshly demanded what he considered his due from his only son, who preferred banishment to acting a dishonourable part towards the girl he had promised to marry. Yes, at last Mr. Claughton could see that he had treated his children hardly. It is the first time that he ever mentally acknowledges Elsie to be his child, little imagining that she was laid to rest years ago in the churchyard of an Italian village.

To the outsider this change in the stockbroker's views may have been imperceptible; yet it was very real, and resulted in two very distinct acts. On reaching home he went at once to the library, and

taking a seat close to the hearth, poked the fire till he succeeded in raising a bright flame; then, going to his desk, he took out a roll of papers, and throwing them into the midst of the flame, watched them consume away. The following day he had a long interview with his lawyer, who a short time afterwards brought him a fresh document to sign in place of the one he had destroyed.

About a month after this occurrence, two friends met in the city, and stopping to exchange a hurried greeting, one said to the other:

"Have you heard that old Claughton has been found dead in his bed? It was heart disease; the doctor had warned him of it."

"Poor fellow!" was the rejoinder.

CHAPTER II.

AN ACCIDENT.

"SHE is a very strange-looking child; but vat a queer life she leads wif dat strange ole shentleman, old enof to be her grandfather."

"And is he not her grandfather?" was the rejoinder.

"Vell, he is shenerally called so; but dat is not my opinion. I remember seeing him ten years ago at ze Bagni di Lucca, and zen he was one very fascinating but complete *Junggesell;* how you say in English?"

"Bachelor; unless my German is very much at fault."

"You are right, dat is just it, battledore."

This conversation took place in the gardens of the Hotel du Parc at Lugano, that most picturesque little town, which, with its narrow, irregular streets, out-of-door traffic and many arcades, presents an almost oriental appearance. The speakers were seated at a small table sipping their after-dinner coffee, and criticising the throng promenading ceaselessly to and fro before them.

"Well now, madam, I feel interested. I wish you would tell me all about the little girl; she is so sweet and cunning."

It seems scarcely necessary to say that the speaker is a native of the great Trans-atlantic Republic. He is apparently about thirty-six, though in reality fully two years younger, with dark hair closely clipped and plentifully sprinkled with grey; he has a habit of frequently contracting his eyebrows, and likewise of drawing in his under lip; the latter fact is specially noticeable, because his face, with the exception of a pair of military-looking, dark chestnut moustaches, is carefully shaved. In short, he presents a somewhat stern appearance at first sight; but a close observer can soon learn that the severe lines in that good, brave face are only marks of persevering self-conquest and unflinching devotion to duty; those bushy eyebrows shade a pair of kindly brown eyes, which light up pleasantly when their owner speaks of the little girl. And we feel we may always trust a man who is chivalrous to women, and loves little children.

Reader, do you begin to recognise an old acquaintance? You may, perhaps, for this is Milton Corbin. Years ago you knew him as a good-looking,

immature, susceptible youth; but time and circumstance have strengthened his manliness and conquered his laziness, yet left him still with a generous loving heart of almost womanly tenderness. After returning to America he was for a long time in a very critical state of health, and forced to spend several winters in Florida; finally, however, he grew stronger, and not liking to remain a useless drone in the New York business world, entered his father's counting-house. The firm of Corbin, Redfern and Co. was one of the oldest established banks in the city of New York, and the senior partner greatly desired that his son should be trained to become his successsor and fill the post worthily. Though little to his taste, Milton stuck valiantly to the office-stool and ledger, which gave his father the utmost satisfaction. When the war broke out, the young man was nothing loath to exchange his pen for a sword and fight for the good cause. He joined a New York regiment and bore himself gallantly; but receiving a wound dangerously near the left lung early in the war, was forced to come home invalided and retire with the rank of captain. It was terribly trying to Milton to feel "laid on the shelf," when the news of battles lost and won, of friends killed, wounded, or promoted, came pouring in daily; yet he suffered all with perfect patience, even as he had fought with lion courage, and done what was far harder, endured the hardships of long marches and night-watches with never failing cheerfulness. But though his wound healed he remained out of health, and at length the old family doctor said to him:

"It is no good refusing, my dear young friend; you want entire change of scene and climate, and we must ship you to Europe."

So very reluctantly the newly-made brevet-colonel obeyed. He had been at Cannes during the winter months, and is now spending a few weeks at Lugano before deciding to which part of Switzerland he will turn his steps. Time has helped him to get over his boyish infatuation; but still somehow he has not found one amongst the many pretty and charming girls in New York to whom he has felt inclined to propose.

And now we must make acquaintance with the lady to whom he is speaking. Baroness von Goltęn is fat, goodnatured-looking, and a favourite in society; for the reason that she is always ready with a piece of news, and knows all the world and everybody's family history, with which she is ever ready to entertain her hearers. Perhaps her popularity is in great measure attributable to the decidedly unusual trait of being a thoroughly goodnatured gossip. She is fond of embellishing her stories with the creatures of her own inventive fancy; but her additions and improvements are never intended to be injurious to her neighbours; indeed, her weakness lies in making princes and princesses in disguise of all with whom she associates, or otherwise designating them as something great and remarkable. Most frequenters of foreign watering-places are familiar with the sight of her little round figure, always handsomely, if sometimes rather fantastically, dressed, with that saucy *nez retroussé* which seems ever sniffing the air for a fresh object of interest; that gracefully rounded arm continually raised for the

purpose of holding a gold double eyeglass to those ever watchful eyes, which, though of no colour in particular, are yet remarkable for the half-amused, half-inquiring looks they dart forth from under their partially closed lids.

Baroness von Golten has seemingly drunk of the elixir of eternal youth, for on this pleasant May evening at Lugano her figure looks as well-shaped, her hair, with the one little curl plastered down on her temple, retains the same glossy blackness, and her age is still as hard to guess, as when she was at the Bagni di Lucca that summer to which she referred in talking to Colonel Corbin. In fact, if possible, she looks yet more thoroughly happy and amused; which may, perhaps, be accounted for by the fact that in those days she had to trip along by the wheel-chair of her gouty old husband. She never failed to be at hand when he wished for conversation, nor to wrap a shawl carefully round his shoulders when the evening shadows fell; but as he was very old, rather cross and perfectly incurable, the little baroness may have thought it a relief to both, when, after trying all imaginable waters in vain, he was at length laid to rest near the whispering pine forest in the pretty Russian cemetery at Wiesbaden. Baron von Golten was a German-Russian from the Baltic province; his wife by birth a German, though by inclination essentially cosmopolitan, speaking and intermingling diverse languages with great fluency, if not equal accuracy. Gossip reported she had been on the stage.

"*Wie romantisch*, Colonel Corbin! Vat you tink so much of de leetle ding. *Ce n'est qu'un enfant!*"

and the little baroness dangles her gold eyeglass between her thumb and forefinger with a look of amusement, yet not quite approving of Colonel Corbin taking so much interest in any little girl, when she herself is ready to give him the latest and most authentic account of the rich English *milor* and *miladi* who arrived at the hotel on the previous evening, and are intimate friends of the entire royal family of Great Britain.

This is how Madame von Golten poetically describes the retired cheesemonger and chandler, late Mayor of Candleton, who is paying a visit to the Continent with his wife and blooming family. The father says:

"It is better than hany amount of 'ome edoocation."

However, to return to Colonel Corbin. At Heidelberg we knew him as the most bashful of youths, and even now he is held by his acquaintances to be a shy man; still, his self-confidence has increased with years, and the hero who withstood the rebels so valiantly, is not to be daunted by a fair lady throwing cold water on his scheme; therefore he says, half-apologetically, yet firmly:

"Indeed, I am fond of children, madam; and, as I observed before, this little girl is so cunning that I am really solicitous of making her acquaintance."

If this good man had a fault, it was the inclination to express himself punctiliously when feeling shy, a peculiarity shared by a good many of his countrymen.

"Well zen, ze occasion is excellent," remarked the good-natured baroness. "See, zee leetle one is going too near ze fire. Vill not you varn her against flagra-

tion ?" and madam points to a spot near the lake, where a travelling showman is making two unfortunate poodles jump through tarred hoops previously set on fire, watched by an amused crowd of bystanders.

Conspicuous amongst the latter is a pleasant-looking woman in the picturesque costume of the Canton Ticino. Her hair, laid flat round her head in a profuse quantity of plaits, is pierced by silver pins, which radiate from the centre of the head like the aureole of a saint. She wears a kilted skirt reaching down to the ankles, a velvet bodice, with sleeves caught up by bows of blue ribband, and a white muslin apron; her feet are clad in coarse white knitted stockings, noticeable because she has, instead of boots, what in her native dialect are termed *zoccoli;* in shape, these are not unlike the old-fashioned English patten, but are made of wood like the French *sabot;* on these the foot rests easily, only confined by a band of ornamental straw and bead-work passed across the instep. A necklet of filigree gold and garnets, and long pendant ear-rings to match, complete the peasant's costume. By her side, clinging half-timidly to her hand, yet stretching her neck eagerly forward to see the fun, is a little girl scarcely less quaintly dressed.

The child's white *piquè* frock is trimmed to the waist with rows of green plaited ribbon; a scarf of the Italian colours, in which green takes a prominent part, falls from her left shoulder; on her head is a high white straw hat bound with green velvet, turned up at one side with a bunch of daisies. Her whole appearance is strange, old-fashioned, yet attractive, though one would wish her dress to be more child-

like; happily, however, her face by no means lacks that quality. One glance at her fine eyes, sparkling with expectation and merriment, will reassure us on that point. These are not southern eyes, any more than her bright, fresh complexion and fair skin are Italian; yet the little one has hair and eye-lashes of raven hue. Whatever her nationality may be, she seems thoroughly conversant with Italian, for listen, she says:

"*Oh, balia, com'è bello!*"—("Oh, nurse, how beautiful it is!")—as the first little dog leaps safely through the tarred ring.

Now the second poodle is to do the same, and the crowd of spectators press closer. This time the performance is not so successful; the showman cracks his whip, but the dog is frightened and refuses to move. The little girl's eagerness conquers her timidity, she stamps her feet with impatience, and not heeding her nurse's cry of: "*Zitto, zitto!*"—("Hush, hush!")—lets go the latter's hand and rushes forward to throw poor *Pepito* a little cake that she finds in her pocket. As she stretches out her arm, a portion of the burning pitch becomes detached from the hoop and falls on her; the child gives a scream of pain and terror, and is caught up in the arms of a tall man, who has lately joined the group of bystanders, and has come quickly forward, foreseeing what is likely to occur. The stranger bears the half-fainting child to the water's edge, and dashes the cool drops on her face; the nurse follows, wringing her hands:

"Oh, *che disgrazia!*—(What a misfortune!)—What would the signor say? Why had she been

so foolish as to bring the child to see the sight, *che, che !*"

After a few moments the little girl opens her eyes and looks bewildered; then Colonel Corbin, for we know it is he, finds time to think of the frightened woman. His knowledge of Italian is very limited, but a few broken phrases, aided by gesticulations, suffice to make the nurse understand that her charge is reviving, and that the strange gentleman is willing to carry the little one home.

In reply, she points to a village resting on the brow of the hill, just where the lake makes a turn, hiding the arm stretching towards Porlezza.

"*La sopra, a Ruvigliano.*"—("Up there, at Ruvigliano.")

It is more than two miles off. Colonel Corbin pities the poor little sufferer, who will doubtless feel the inevitable jolting terribly, whilst being carried up that rugged path in the ever-increasing darkness; for by this time, in that country where there is scarcely any twilight, the shadows have deepened rapidly, and numberless stars begin to twinkle in the sky. However, delay being useless, Colonel Corbin starts off, at a steady pace, to the point where the ascent commences, at the back of a fisherman's hut.

The nurse follows close at his heels, more subdued, but still giving vent to her woe in occasional lamentations and exclamations.

CHAPTER III.

A GENTLE SOLDIER.

It is no easy task which Milton has undertaken. By this time they have passed all the lamps in the gardens, and the twinkling stars are their only guide. He can no longer distinguish the features of the little sufferer, but occasionally hears a low moan escape from her lips, and feels her shrink and nestle closer to him, as, despite the utmost care, the darkness causes him to stumble. He longs to speak some word of pity and consolation, yet the fear of not making himself understood, and perhaps a touch of shyness, render him speechless for a while. At last he murmurs a low:

"*Poveretta!*" ("Poor little one!")

And a sweet, patient voice answers:

"*Non fa cosi male.*" ("It does not hurt so very much.")

He would dearly love to tell her what a brave little girl he thinks her, but his conversational powers are at an end, so once more the sound of his and the nurse's footsteps alone break the silence. At length their toil is over, and they reach the hamlet of Ruvigliano. With a good deal of difficulty Colonel Corbin finds his way up some narrow, broken steps. The nurse produces a key, and after fumbling at the lock, which Milton fears must seem an eternity to the poor little sufferer, the door is opened, and they find themselves in the smallest space between four walls which could possibly represent a room. The nurse opens a

second door leading into another room, scarcely larger than the first, where two beds stand; Colonel Corbin lays down his precious burden on one of these. The nurse arranges the pillows, and he feels disposed to go; the child, however, takes hold of his hand, and he does not like to withdraw it from her grasp, and therefore waits whilst the woman bustles about lighting a lamp, and bringing oil and bits of old linen to dress the burns.

"*Poveretta, poveretta!*" exclaims the nurse; her kindly face is filled with compassion as she looks at her little charge, who smiles in return.

She then holds up the lamp to inspect the child's injuries; the right hand and arm as far as the elbow are considerably burnt, but the cool oil eases the pain and the child smiles gratefully. Colonel Corbin presses his lips on her forehead, and with a nod to the nurse silently takes leave.

It does not take Milton a very long time to retrace his steps; like the kindhearted man that he is, he feels great pity for the poor little child, yet wonders how the Russian baroness will receive him on his return after leaving her so abruptly. He does not know whether she witnessed the whole scene; if so, will she laugh at him, as she has often done, for his quixotic chivalry? She frequently tells him his existence in the nineteenth century is an anachronism; that he belongs to an age when brave knights would face any dangers "to win a glove from their ladye love," and heroes did battle for beautiful princesses held in bondage by wicked enchanters. Colonel Corbin is perfectly aware that Baroness Golten is not an unkind

woman, but she is a vain one; and though she would applaud his trying to rescue the child, she may have expected his task to end there, and deemed it more polite had he consigned the little one to the nurse's care, and returned to hear the story about the English *milord.*

On reaching the garden of the Hotel du Parc, Colonel Corbin found it almost deserted; nearly all the visitors had crowded into the public *salon,* where Baroness Golten was singing an air from some Italian opera in a very theatrical style. Once she had had a powerful voice; now, all that could be said of her high notes was "had you but heard them twenty years ago;" still, she was not wanting in self-confidence, and made up by contortions both of face and body for her vocal deficiencies. And she gained her point—she impressed her audience.

Either Colonel Corbin's characteristic diffidence made him anxious to escape the nagging of Frau von Golten, or he must really have been very anxious to inquire after his new little friend, for he went straight to his own room, and gave orders to be called considerably earlier than usual next morning. His servant did not fail to obey, and a full hour before the baroness was ready to sip her customary cup of coffee under the verandah, Milton had started off for a long ramble.

Perhaps, whilst he begins his walk, the reader will be willing to learn a little about this child in whom he takes an interest, and be informed how he first happened to notice her. His love for children was the primary cause; he never tired of watching the

number of merry, prettily-dressed little ones of various nations running about the hotel-gardens, and during the past week had been struck by this strangely-dressed child, who was always accompanied either by a grey-haired old man or her nurse, neither of whom let her wander from their side, though she sometimes cast wistful glances at the other children at play. For the last day or two the old gentleman had not been visible, nor had the nurse and her charge shown themselves in the hotel gardens; but Colonel Corbin had seen them several times walking by the lake. The delight he took in seeing children enjoy themselves had enlisted his sympathies for this little girl; he thought it a sad unnatural life for her never to be allowed to join in the pleasures of companions of her own age; yet she seemed very contented, and trotted along by the side of her nurse or grandfather prattling away as merrily as possible.

Milton had asked the so-called grandfather's name, and been told he was a certain Signor Loretti, a picture-dealer and antiquary from Milan. Though this information did not enlighten Colonel Corbin as to who the little girl might be, it is likely to have a different effect on the reader, who, doubtless, has long ago felt sure that she can be none other than Teresina, Elsie's child. It is so; I have no reason to wish to conceal the fact.

At the time of her mother's death, when she was confided to the care of the blacksmith's wife at San Martino, the Suzzara household received a further addition in the shape of Piccolo. The little dog spent three days and nights in Rocaleto Cemetery, lying on

his beloved mistress's grave, howling piteously, and utterly disregarding all attempts made to entice him away; on the fourth day he returned of his own accord to Casa Pandolfini, ran into the room where Elsie's baby was sleeping, and lying down by the little one's side, constituted himself from that time forth her special guardian and protector.

He remained faithful for the rest of his days to this self-imposed charge, never willingly quitting the child's side for a moment, and lavishing as many caresses on her as he had on her mother. But when Teresina was six years old, Piccolo, then grown stiff and rheumatic, was run over by a cart; he only lived a few hours after this; Teresina, sobbing as if her childish heart must break, stroked his faithful head, and with one last look at his young charge Elsie's "wee doggie" died.

In the autumn of that same year when Slaney Claughton had lost his wife, he returned to Milan to pursue his studies. Life seemed purposeless to him now; yet he must not be idle: his child must be provided for, and he knew of no other way to do this than by working at the profession of music. Elsie, too, had taken so much interest in his success as a singer, that Slaney felt he would rather try and persevere in that career than attempt anything else. Yet many a time during that first winter, when a delighted audience listened enraptured to what they deemed a triumph of art, the thrilling accents, the quiver in the singer's voice, were not telling the imaginary woes of some romantic lover, but the real grief of a broken-hearted widower.

During the first year of her young life Elsie's baby lived and throve at San Martino in the safe keeping of her nurse Lucia, who became as fondly attached to her as if she had been her own child. Every now and then Slaney managed to run down for a day to the village and pay a visit to his little daughter. About a year and a half after Baby Teresina had been left motherless a bad fever broke out at San Martino, and the blacksmith was amongst its victims. Lucia, now left a widow, no longer felt bound to the village by any special tie, and consented to take her little charge to Milan.

When Slaney had made up his mind to return to that city, and yet shrunk from the idea of living alone in a place where, only a few months before, he had had such an amiable and dearly-loved companion, Signor Loretti suggested that they should keep house together. He urged that, besides being pleasant for them both, they would also always have a home to which to welcome Vincent Hardwicke when returning from his frequent journeys. To this proposition Slaney gladly assented, likewise the artist, who was seized with a stay-at-home fit; consequently the two men took up their abode at the picture-dealer's house. This plan proved very successful, and at the beginning of the second winter Baby Teresina, her nurse, and Piccolo joined the party. It was rather a strange home for the little one; yet it would be hard to decide who amongst its inmates petted her most. She was a bright ray of sunshine amidst the grey shadows of the sombre old house.

Signor Loretti lived far away from the modern,

fashionable part of Milan, in a narrow, irregular street, where there were many-storied houses with high, slanting roofs. The space between the buildings was often so limited that a carriage could scarcely pass through, and to make way for a funeral procession the passer-by was forced to squeeze close up to the wall. The picture-dealer's house had been a palace in days gone by; a broad marble staircase led to lofty, spacious apartments with tapestry hangings and frescoed ceilings, containing many a fine old picture and curiously wrought bronze, which the owner had ferreted out and bought for considerably less than their value. The ground-floor was his sanctum; there he slept, kept most of his treasures for sale, and received people on business. The first and second stories were set apart for his own use and the friends who had taken up their abode with him; there, too, the artist had his studio.

Above were still three flats, chiefly let in single or small sets of rooms to artists struggling on the road to fame. It was whispered that several of these young men lived rent free, and that none found a very hard landlord in Loretti. The old man was quite free from avarice, that supposed characteristic of antiquaries and curiosity collectors; indeed, many a youth coming to seek his fortune at Milan owed future success to kindly aid bestowed on him by the picture-dealer when poor and inexperienced.

Teresina was a healthy child, but very diminutive, and resembled her mother in that respect as well as by her eyes, hair, and complexion. The first nine years of her life were spent chiefly in her nurse's

company; therefore she learnt Italian before her own language: but her father always spoke English to her when he came home of an evening, and they played together till her bedtime; so did her grandfather, in whose studio she found a kindly welcome at all hours of the day. Signor Loretti also was as fond of the child as if he stood in the same relationship to her; he loved to show her his pictures and curiosities, and Teresina picked up a strange medley of information concerning legends of saints, the value of china and bronzes, and many other things usually out of the range of knowledge of a child of her age. But of the dates of the reigns of English kings, spelling-books, and geography, or even the Church Catechism—in short, of matters a correctly-brought up little girl is supposed to have learnt—Teresina knew nothing. Her knowledge of religion was a strange jumble of a few Bible stories told by her father, legends of the saints picked up from Signor Loretti, and a few simple prayers in Italian taught her by her nurse.

It may shock some minds to hear that Lucia taught her young charge to wind up her petitions with an *ora pro nobis,* and to make a little genuflection before the altar whereon the sacred pledges of redemption were placed, whenever they entered or left the cathedral or any of the many other churches in which Milan is so rich; but I am content to think that these things did the little one no harm, whilst the simple faith with which she gazed on pictures of the Holy Infant influenced her own young life for good, and caused her chiefly to reverence the gentle mother as the loving guardian of the dear Christ-child.

Teresina lived very happily under the picture-dealer's roof; her father was there in the winter, but generally went away in the summer, and her grandfather came and went as the fancy seized him. When they were both absent, the child remained with Lucia and Signor Loretti; the latter she had learnt to call "Amico" (friend), and as they were seldom apart, grew almost more attached to him than to her own relations.

Slaney Claughton never got beyond being a good concert-singer; he was rejected at the Scala as not having a sufficiently powerful voice, but was much sought after both at public and private concerts, and his numerous engagements proved very remunerative. He never quite recovered the shock of his wife's death, and was a prey to restlessness and continual craving for change; even the deep love he bore his little daughter could not overcome this feeling. A sense of duty made him work diligently all the winter at his profession, but returning spring always brought the old longing for constant change of scene, and made him willingly enter into all his father-in-law's travelling projects. By the end of May he had invariably shaken the plentiful Milanese dust off his feet, not to tread it again till the short days made travelling no longer pleasant.

Ten years after Elsie's death, he started as usual with Mr. Hardwicke, this time for Verona, with the then little known Dolomite regions for their ultimate destination. Teresina remained at Milan as usual, under the care of Lucia and Signor Loretti. When the weather became unbearably hot, Lucia took her young charge to breathe the pure country air at Rocaleto and

spend six happy weeks at Casa Pandolfini, where Giacomo and Linda, both grown into tall, handsome children, treated her like a little princess, never tiring of bringing her offerings of daisy-chains, butterflies of many hues, or bright green lizards, to show their devotion. To them of course the *bella signora's* memory was but a tradition, but on Sundays their parents sometimes took them to the *campo santo*, when they never omitted to lay flowers on the stranger's grave, and say a *pater noster* for the repose of her soul.

Whilst Lucia and Teresina were at Rocaleto, the picture-dealer also went away for change of air; formerly he had been a great frequenter of fashionable resorts, where he met with people likely to buy his works of art; but now, as years crept on, he did not care to go far, and the lakes of Como, Maggiore, and Lugano were his favourite haunts. Autumn found him once more at home, the first of the scattered party; soon he was joined by Lucia and Teresina, the latter looking stronger and more sunburnt than ere leaving Milan.

"Show me thy last letter from thy father, *Teresina mia*," says the old man in Italian to the child, as she sits on his knee on the first evening of her return.

"Here it is, Amico," and she produces a crumpled paper from her pocket; "I always keep father's letter till I get a new one. This one is quite old—look. Naughty father, I have written him two little letters since."

"Let me see, dear child. Ah, it is from Verona, dated five weeks back; and he also tells thee to direct

to the post-office there, as he and thy grandfather are moving about."

"Have you fresh news, Amico?"

"Yes, little one, somewhat more recent," the good man does not say that it is but two days later. He feels surprised at Slaney's long silence; but, not being fond of writing himself, finds excuses for his friend, and besides, does not wish to make Teresina anxious. He is glad that she is soon quite absorbed in listening to the touching legend he relates to her of the trees bowing their branches before the Holy Infant during the flight into Egypt, and offering Him their fruits; and of the beasts of prey crouching down in silent, submissive homage.

But Teresina does not long rest content without news of her father, and when days and weeks pass without tidings of him and her grandfather, she often addresses eager questions to Lucia and Loretti concerning them, and receives no information, for they have none to give.

Weeks become months, and so the winter passes. Loretti cannot imagine what has become of his friends, and makes inquiries both at Verona and elsewhere, but with no result. At length spring comes, and the time when Slaney and his father-in-law usually start on their travels, and still no news. Then comes a day when, after long and earnest consideration, old Pietro Loretti calls Lucia and Teresina into his private room, and, taking the latter on his knee and folding his arms tenderly round her, he tells how he must needs think that her father and grandfather are no more, or else they would not have forsaken their darling; so that

henceforth she has only Amico and Lucia to look to as her protectors.

"Say, dear one," he adds, "wilt thou be my own little girl, good and obedient to thine old friend?"

And the child amidst her sobs murmurs:

"Yes, yes, Amico."

Lucia wipes her eyes with her apron.

Then for a while all three are silent.

CHAPTER IV.

A MEETING.

THE picture-dealer had grown more and more attached to Teresina, now he had come to look on her as his own little girl, and loved to be able to watch over her always; therefore he had taken her and Lucia with him to the lakes for the last two summers.

The second year he had chosen Lugano, which fully equals both its more widely famed neighbours in attractiveness; the fact of its expanse of water being less enhances if anything the charm of the surrounding scenery, by bringing it closer; for, though exquisitely beautiful, it hardly rises to the level of grandeur.

After spending a short time at the Hôtel du Parc, Loretti had received a sudden call to Milan; he was unwilling Teresina should leave the pure country air for the stifling town, and arranged that Lucia should take rooms at her native village of Ruvigliano, to which to go with the child till his return.

During the night following the accident already recounted, Teresina had suffered a great deal from the burn on her arm, and tossed wearily and feverishly to and fro; but a few hours of refreshing sleep towards morning had worked wonders for both her and the nurse, who was worn by watching and anxiety. Teresina, unselfish and considerate beyond her years, was very sorry to have cost Lucia her night's rest; and when the latter appears early in the morning, with a cup of fresh milk and some tempting-looking slices of brown bread and butter, she receives her with smiles and a little joke about having suddenly grown so helpless that Balia must hold her cup for her, like when she was a baby. In another hour she is seated quite contentedly on a rough wooden balcony overlooking the deep-green lake. The sky is of that pure cobalt colour, the mere sight of which brings joy to the heart; all around is bathed in brightness and sunshine, the wooded San Salvatore rising sentinel-like in stately solitariness above the waters; the vine-clad slopes and white villas with green shutters, standing in terraced gardens rich in fruit and flowers; the chain of hills encircling the lake; finally, in the far, far distance a mere suffusion of white and pink, the faint outline of Monte Rosa and the giant Twins.

Teresina enjoys everything, scene, air, sunshine—the hum of insect life—the scent of lemon-blossom wafted from the gardens reaching down to the water's edge; but she is specially interested in watching the greater or lesser specks—from the height they appear little more—gliding over the water, which are in reality

boats with various coloured awnings and flags. Amico had promised to take her out for a row some pleasant evening; but he is gone, and who knows if he will think of it on his return? Balia has a cousin a boatman, with a straw hat and streamers, on which are golden anchors, a red shirt, and a broad, many-coloured scarf round his waist, who has offered again and again to take them out. But Balia is so easily frightened, she cannot make up her mind to go during the *signore's* absence, and now, since last night's accident, will of course be doubly anxious. Teresina fears her chance of the coveted pleasure is very small; however, the fluttering of a flight of pigeons turns her thoughts and eyes in a fresh direction. Ever since she can remember she has loved to watch these birds billing and cooing and strutting about the streets, seeing what they can find to pick up. At home at Milan, when she calls to her winged favourites, they come quickly in answer to her gentle summons, perch fearlessly on her shoulders, nestle close to her cheek, and peck away till the feast prepared for them is consumed. Their most frequent resting-place is amongst the arches, niches, and figures of the old church hard by. Teresina loves specially to see a pure, white bird reposing peacefully on the statue of some holy man, reminding her of the outpouring of that precious gift so familiar to her in sacred art, and without which, as Amico often tells her, there never could have been any saints, or indeed a church at all.

The Ruvigliano pigeons are far wilder than her own home friends: it has been their fate far too often, whilst seeking for food in the village, to be disturbed by some mischievous boy pelting them. B-r-r, b-r-r,

b-r-r, now again they flutter away; where is the enemy before whom they have fled? This time it turns out to be a tall, thin man coming round the corner, doing the sword exercise with his cane as he walks along; it is his parries and thrusts which have frightened the birds away. In his left hand he carries some large blue gentians and lilies of the valley. He glances up at the balcony where Teresina is seated, and a kind smile lights up his bronzed face; then he stops his fencing and raises his hat with as much deference as if saluting a grown-up lady, instead of a little girl of twelve years old. Teresina gives a shout of pleasure;

"Oh, Balia, Balia, here is the kind *signore!*"

Then Lucia appears for a moment smiling and curtseying, only to disappear again to show the gentleman the way in. She is not quite sure in her own mind whether Signor Loretti would approve of her making acquaintances in his absence; but then he will be back soon, and this stranger is an undoubted *gentil'uomo;* and what weighs most of all with her, his coming pleases her young charge, who has had so much pain, *poveretta,* to drive her smiles away.

Evidently no similar thoughts perplex Colonel Corbin. He thought his new little friend might like a few flowers, and has been up the Monte Bré to gather them; what more natural than to bring them himself, and inquire how she is?

Teresina does not know the nationality of this gentleman, who has been so kind to her. His very dark complexion and peculiar cast of features give her no clue to it; he might be an Italian or Spaniard, only the few words he spoke the evening before reminded her

of her father. Perhaps the stranger is an Englishman.

"*Fiori*" (flowers), says Colonel Corbin; "Monte Bré." And he points towards the heights.

Teresina smiles yet more brightly, and stretches out her left hand to take them.

"*Oh, grazie, grazie, che bellezza, mughetti e genziane!*" (Oh, thanks, thanks; how beautiful! lilies of the valley and gentians). She raises her little head, and looks with frank, childlike confidence into the giver's face.

Then, as if in a dream, both in its vagueness and swiftness, through the long vista of years, the memory of deep-blue eyes he has known long, long ago comes back to Milton's mind; eyes strangely like those now gazing so fearlessly into his. No others he has since seen have ever had the same power to attract him. He gives a twitch to his moustachès, as is his habit when some idea strikes him suddenly; there is a far-off look in his face, and he murmurs just audibly:

"Yes, yes; it must be so."

"Ah, then you are English!" burst from Teresina's lips. His sudden fit of absence has puzzled her; she has been wondering if it is that he has come to the end of his Italian; but now she is very pleased.

Excepting her father and grandfather, and old Mr. Dawson, who had paid them a visit when she was seven years old, she has never spoken to any one of her own nationality. Amico is not fond of speaking English, and likes best to hear her chatter to him in Italian, being apparently jealous of anything that might tend to remind his own little girl that she is

only his by adoption. Yet nationality asserts itself in Teresina; her father often talked to her of their country, with its rich green meadows and grand old trees, beautiful alike in its stately ancestral halls and neatly kept cottage homes with their picturesque thatches and gables. He had promised to take her there when she was grown up. Her grandfather, too, had, in his rough way, helped the conviction to take root in her young mind that the people of Great Britain were superior to any "beggarly foreigners," as he termed them. During the last two years Teresina has felt the want of some one to speak English with; she often talks it to herself at play, and reads over the few stray story-books her father had given her from time to time; but still, of late, she feels a difference; the words do not come as easily as they once did, and now a secret fear has come to her that perhaps the language of her real country may slip altogether out of her memory. We can thus easily imagine her delight at the fancied discovery.

"No," Milton answers, in reply to her question as to his nationality, with a little nervous laugh which is natural to him; "you are mistaken; I am an American."

"Oh!" and there is a shade of disappointment in the child's voice. "But you speak English?"

"Yes, indeed;" and again he laughs; "that is our language."

Teresina stops to consider what she knows of America—chiefly that it is a country in which negroes, Red Indians, and George Washington play a part—but she would be puzzled to assign the right one to each, so forbears making any comment. She had thought it

would be amusing to tell him that she too is English, but now supposes he probably would not be interested to hear it. She looks at the flowers he has brought, and says in a slightly foreign accent, rolling the "r's" a little:

"They are very pretty. How good of you to get them for me! Does it take long to go up to the top of the mountain, and are there many butterflies and lizards there?"

"It took me two hours to reach the top of Monte Bré from Lugano," Corbin replies. "There are quite a number of butterflies of different colours there, and green lizards too. Strange to say, the lilies-of-the-valley grow at the highest point; then there are cyclamen, Solomon's seal, and many, many other flowers. I saw a long black snake—such a fellow! half as long again as my cane. He was basking in the sunshine, at the top of a stone wall."

Colonel Corbin goes on to tell of the variety of insects and reptiles in which the neighbourhood abounds. Baroness Golten has supplied him with several startling anecdotes concerning encounters she believes she has had with scorpions, vipers, and so forth. A peculiarity of these combats is that they always take place in the most unlikely places when she is alone; of course, on every occasion her deeds of valour have been marvellous. One account of a hooded reptile, something between a frog and a snake, which springs suddenly upon people, and requires whole regiments to capture it, specially amuses Teresina, who interprets the story to her nurse, and asks if she ever heard of anything of the kind. Lucia shakes her head

somewhat incredulously, but makes the sacred sign, and says one cannot tell in these days what form the Evil One may assume, only perhaps the children of the true faith are kept from seeing these apparitions.

Thus they chatter on for more than an hour. Colonel Corbin's love for children has taught him the art of finding out what will interest them; and when flowers and insects have had their share, boats and the lake come under discussion; then Teresina lets out how greatly she wishes for a row, and how small her hopes of success seem. Colonel Corbin says when she is quite well again he will gladly take them both on the water, if Lucia wlll only trust him, and promises the boat shall have a flag and an awning, cushions, and a boatman in the costume the little girl admires so much. Then, adding that he will come back to inquire after the patient's progress very soon again, he says good-bye, and returns to Lugano.

The *table d'hôte* luncheon is already over, and, as Milton sits down to his solitary meal, it is not without a feeling of satisfaction that Baroness Golten is not there to quiz him. They meet, however, at dinner; but the fates befriend him: she is too much taken up with descanting on the charms of the English *milord* and his family to have much time to think of his shortcomings; indeed, seems to have forgotten the yesterday's incident. She has also a fresh piece of news to tell Colonel Corbin. A compatriot of his has arrived, doubtless a very distinguished man.

"I know not whether he be from New York," she adds, as if our hero must necessarily know all about the man, if such were the case.

Colonel Corbin notices that there is a vacant place opposite him, and secretly rejoices. It will be a relief to be near a countryman. Hitherto the Babel of tongues all round him, vociferous Italians, Germans talking at the top of their voices, and the hissing articulation of both Poles and Russians, have greatly bewildered him.

The empty seat does not remain long unoccupied. A showily-dressed little man, whose watch-chain is adorned by a profusion of lockets and charms, saunters into the dining-room, and, with an air of bland self-satisfaction, and what is intended to be an irresistible smile, bows to the company in general, and seats himself opposite Colonel Corbin. Time has, as we know, worked so great a change in the latter, that few would be likely to recognise in that almost stern-looking, soldierly man, the smooth-faced, indolent youth of Heidelberg days. This, however, cannot be said of the newcomer. He is stouter, and his hair a little thinner than when we last met; but that plain, good-natured face is as complacent-looking as ever; that perfectly self-confident manner has undergone no change. One glance at the man is sufficient to convince the reader that he is Obadiah Twirl, son of the New England deacon; nor does Colonel Corbin require to send for the visitors' book to arrive at a similar conclusion.

Shrinking, as from our knowledge of his character we can only expect he would, from so public a recognition, scarcely knowing to what lengths Twirl's very demonstrative cordiality might lead him, Milton devotes himself assiduously to the little baroness, and keeps his face steadily turned away from the direction in

which his *vis-d-vis* happens to be. These precautions are almost superfluous, for Mr. Twirl is completely engrossed in trying to make a conquest of the stiff and shy eldest daughter of the English ex-mayor seated on his right.

Baroness Golten essays once or twice to lure Colonel Corbin into speaking to his countryman, but is unsuccessful; and our hero keeps his discovery carefully to himself.

Dinner being over, all gladly escape from the *table d'hôte* room, where the eternal battle about shut and open windows is being waged between British love of fresh air and the extreme fear of draughts common to all Continental nations.

Colonel Corbin seats himself at a little table in the verandah, to indulge in coffee and a cigarette. Ere long, Mr. Twirl takes up a similar position at a little distance, and, whilst waiting for his coffee, reads the visitor's list, to which he has just been asked to add his name. He sees no other familiar to him, chiefly "skis" and "koffs," preceded by several unpronounceable syllables, and turns over the pages very rapidly. At length the letters U.S.A., written in a bold hand, arrest his attention; and, as his eyes fall on the name of Milton Washington Corbin, he vents his astonishment in a protracted:

"Wal, I do think!"

The waiter is long in bringing the coffee, and Mr. Twirl wanting a match for his cigar, rises and asks Colonel Corbin to oblige him with a light. To this request, put in very strange French, Milton answers with an unmistakeably American:

"Yes, indeed."

"Hulloa! Can it be possible, Corbin? Glad to see yer—glad to see yer!"

Mr. Twirl is rather doubtful whether he has really hit upon the right person. Yet he knows there is but one American besides himself in the hotel, and the man he is now addressing is undoubtedly one.

"This is an unexpected meeting, Mr. Twirl," says Colonel Corbin. "Where have you come from, or rather, where have you been all these years?"

"Wal, I calc'late I have been pretty near everywhere since last we met. Home half-a-dozen times; made a trip to California; also Florida and Havannah. It was quite worth going to the last place for the sake of the cigars; and, my! hadn't I trouble at the Customs bringing them home; I jist danced. Then I joined a party to make a tour round the world: I thought it would be quite an education in itself; but we did it so fast, that all my geographical, topographical, and general knowledge of nations, lands, and tongues has been in a hopeless muss ever since. Wal, then I thought I'd rest a bit, so I came back to Europe and never budged from Baden-Baden for three whole seasons; and paid my little daily tribute to Benazet as reg'lar as clockwork. Then I got tired of that, and went home agin, and grew quite straightlaced; and attended father's prayer-meetings, and took a class in Sunday-school. I went into business again and made some money; for my time at Baden-Baden had made a hole in my purse, and now here I am back in Europe for a little tour. And what have yer been doing all this while?"

This rapid account quite took Milton's breath away; his patriotism was a good deal shocked at the idea of this man of independent means, and in good health, having been, to say the least, idling away his time whilst his country stood in need of every strong arm she could muster to fight for her good cause, and every cent that could be contributed would be thankfully spent to bring comfort to the needy, the wounded, and the dying. Therefore Mr. Twirl received but a curt reply.

"I went home soon after you last saw me, and when the war came struck a blow with the rest for the good cause."

Colonel Corbin was unnecessarily severe, though ignorantly so. Mr. Obadiah Twirl had not, it is true, joined the army; but during the three years he had spent at home "on business," as he termed it, had by no means led a life of selfish luxury. He had made but few economies, on account of the large sums he lavished on patriotic purposes, and in helping the widows and orphans of the slain. Nor was this all. Each day he visited the hospitals, whiling away many a weary hour for the convalescent by stories told with a good deal of rough humour, or soothing the last moments of the dying by a word of real comfort, perhaps often none the less acceptable because given in homely fashion.

Milton had always allowed that Twirl was good-natured; but that was scarcely doing him justice. His manners, way of speaking, and general appearance might be hopelessly unrefined, he himself given to too much idle talking and boasting; but despite all these sins against good taste, the little man had a

kindly heart, and was ever ready to do a friendly act or help any weary brother whom he might happen to meet in his somewhat erratic path through life.

CHAPTER V.

IN SEARCH OF A CLUE.

THE advent of the Misses Gingham, the retired tallow-chandler's tall daughters, soon put a stop to the conversation between Colonel Corbin and Mr. Twirl; for the latter, who was never half an hour in a place before he was planning picnics, dances, or theatricals, at once darted off to suggest to his new acquaintances an ascent of the San Salvatore for the morrow.

Thus left to himself, for the baroness was safely disposed of at the piano, surrounded by a group of flatterers, Colonel Corbin fell to musing. It was strange, very strange, he thought, that twice that day circumstances should have roused in his mind recollections which had long lain dormant of those days of his boyish attachment to Elsie Hardwicke. First the eyes of the pretty child, who had taken his fancy had done this—they were not in the least like what one would expect in an Italian; and then came the meeting with Mr. Twirl.

Colonel Corbin did not know whether to be glad or sorry. Anything connected with that time at Heidelberg was full of interest for him; and yet what was the good of raking up memories of unsatisfied longings and unfulfilled hopes? For the rest of the

evening he avoided joining any of his hotel acquaintances, but paced to and fro, smoking and indulging in a dream of the past, and what might have been. The temptation to this was too strong to be resisted; so likewise was the inclination to entertain the hope that Mr. Twirl, in his numerous wanderings, had come across either the Hardwickes or Mr. Claughton, and would be able to give him some information concerning them.

The romantic vein, known to us of old, had been nurtured in the soldier's heart by watch-fire and sick-bed musings, and though he felt he could in all safety meet Mrs. Slaney Claughton, who would probably have grown quite matronly by that time, yet a halo would ever remain for him round the recollections of those summer months at Heidelberg fourteen years ago.

"Going in hard for the dry goods business, this time, I see,' remarked Colonel Corbin, with a touch of humour, alluding to the peculiar name of Mr. Twirl's new friends, as he met the latter coming into the hotel on the following evening with a wreath of Alpine roses round his wideawake, alpenstock in hand, and attired in a loose flannel suit, looking both dusty and warm, just as a bevy of ladies in fresh, cool muslin dresses, and gentlemen in faultlessly neat attire, were trooping into the *table d'hôte* room, expectant of dinner.

"Wal, now, don't yer talk, Corbin. Yer are no bad hand at it yerself, I'll be bound. Leastways, yer used not to be. My! I shall never forget yer first meeting with that little professoress I used to poke

fun at yer about. I never saw a chap make sich eyes before: they looked for all the world as big as those of the dorg in the fairy story, that had eyes like saucers, and they gleamed like a red-hot poker. Wal, I calc'late I must go and dress now, I am real hungry. My! Miss Drygoods's appetite was made so keen by the mountain air, that she ate all my sandwiches as well as her own. But maybe yer'll smoke yer cigar with me after dinner, and then we will have a chat together. I have seen nothing of yer. And, despite of the sandwiches, I have promised to travel along with those Britishers to Verona to-morrow — the proper place for exchanging sweet thoughts, yer know, with all those inspiring recollections of Romeo and Juliet."

The after-dinner conversation revealed to Colonel Corbin the disappointing fact that hitherto Mr. Twirl had met with no trace of either Mr. Hardwicke or the Claughtons since they were all at Heidelberg together.

The following morning Mr. Obadiah Twirl did indeed seat himself on the box-seat of a *vetturino* drawn by four brisk little horses, with pheasants' feathers standing erect above their ears, and jingling bells adorning their necks. Inside the conveyance were the worthy Mr. Gingham, with his spouse and two youngest daughters. But for Jemima, the fascinating consumer of sandwiches, room was found next to Mr. Twirl, whose manner of supplying unlimited champagne to his friends at *table d'hôte*, and the open-handed way in which he scattered largesse amongst boatmen, guides, waiters, and so forth, backed up by a goodly amount of bragging, had somewhat impressed the wife

of the retired tallow-chandler, who thought it would be no small feather in her cap to return to her native place of Candleton having caught an American millionaire for her Mima.

Honest old Tom Gingham shook his head, and said them 'ere Yankees were sharp customers, and he did not like their goings on; nor did he approve of picking up the first stray chap that made up to his girls, and had nothing particular to recommend him but a spice of impudence. But it must be confessed the ex-mayor was hen-pecked, and he had to keep his grumbling to himself, and fit in with his wife's arrangements.

Colonel Corbin, being simply abroad to rest and get strong, had formed no definite plans. He had thought of going later to Bellaggio or Cadenabbia, but the hotel suited him. He was not over-fond of changing his quarters, and, somehow, the interest he took in his new little friend made him rather loath to go. The disappointment of finding that Mr. Twirl could give him none of the information he desired was still fresh enough to make him cling all the more to anything which might hold out the hope of a clue to his search. In this wise it came to pass that the possibility gradually suggested itself to his mind that there might be a reason for the likeness which had struck him in Teresina's eyes to those of his boyish love. And partly with a view to solving this problem, he went frequently to Ruvigliano, carrying little presents of fruit or flowers to the child as an excuse for his appearance. These visits served to strengthen his conviction considerably. The child's likeness to Elsie Claughton was unmistakable; excepting her dark hair there was nothing of an Italian about

her. Her deep blue eyes were undoubtedly of the colour more especially belonging to the Irish, a fact easily recognisable by an American, on account of the large amount of people of that nation settled in the United States. Then why should the little girl speak English so well, and seem to take such pleasure in it? This she could not have learnt either from the old Tessin nurse, or the old *signore*, who was unmistakably Italian. In addition to which, Baroness Golten had most emphatically declared her disbelief in Signor Loretti being Teresina's grandfather. Colonel Corbin was not good at questioning people as to their private affairs. He had not Obadiah Twirl's happy faculty —shall we call it?—of finding out people's birth, parentage, income, and so forth, within twenty-four hours of making their acquaintance; or the baroness's still greater talent for knowing a great deal more about her neighbours than they did themselves. In this particular case, too, Colonel Corbin was in no hurry to put a question which might instantly shatter all the hopes it had given him so much pleasure to build up. Therefore, it was not till a week after they first made acquaintance, on the occasion of Colonel Corbin's fourth visit to Ruvigliano, that whilst indulging in his favourite habit of tracing letters on the ground with his cane, he suddenly turned to the pretty child and said

"I would trace your initials, but you have never told me your name, although we are quite old friends now."

"Why, you know, I am called Teresina."

"Ah, but that is not all. I mean your full name like mine is: Milton Washington Corbin."

"Ah, yes. Teresina Loretti." This was said with some hesitation. Time upon time Slaney had taken the utmost pains to make his child repeat the name of Claughton, and told her that that, and not Clautoni, was the good old name of his English forefathers. But Amico had said: "Child, if anyone asketh what thou art called, say Teresina Loretti, for so I would have it." This piece of jealousy on the old man's part caused the child of his adoption far more pain than he was at all aware of. To her loyal little heart it seemed a grievous wrong to her father's memory not to call herself by the name that he had taught her; but she was very obedient, and so, for the sake of the promise she had made to Amico, with her arms round his neck, to do his bidding and be his own little girl, she had learnt to make this little sacrifice cheerfully, and answer as he wished.

To Milton Corbin her reply was indeed a disappointment.

Lucia watched over her charge very faithfully, and kept her quiet on the balcony of their tumbled-down lodging, amusing her by endless legends and stories, to which Teresina's imaginative young mind was content to listen for hours together. The longing for a row on the lake was the only wish which still suggested itself very often to the little girl's mind, but Balia would not hear of it. Secretly she dreaded the possible anger of Signor Loretti if she ventured on such an expedition in his absence; but she pleaded the necessity of Teresina's remaining quiet if she wished her arm to heal, and for ten days the child accepted the excuse without attempting to put it aside. After a while,

however, she began to renew her entreaties, assuring Balia that the burn was nearly healed, and Colonel Corbin joined in pleading her cause. The nurse found it no pleasant task to thwart the dear young *signorina*, and after holding out valiantly for a time, was forced to surrender on seeing a tear glisten in Teresina's usually merry eyes.

It was a calm, beautiful afternoon, the lake smooth as glass; no cloud was to be seen. Antonio the boatman, Lucia's cousin and old love, as some said, was consulted, and expressed his belief that they could choose no better time for a row. Colonel Corbin sent down a supply of cushions, rugs, and an American flag; Antonio donned his gay scarf and hat with streamers, and the gorge of Osteno was decided on as their destination.

Lucia's misgivings vanished before Teresina's radiant smiles as she watched from the little wooden balcony for Colonel Corbin's appearance, and clapped her hands and jumped for joy as soon as he came in sight. Once on the water, it was far too pleasant for any further anxiety to find room. Antonio's muscular figure looked to such advantage as he stood plying his oars in the middle of the boat, with a smile of welcome on his bronzed face, that the memory of the late Lorenzo Suzzara was quite effaced *pro tem.* from the buxom widow's heart.

Colonel Corbin always enjoyed being on the water, and was gratified at feeling he was giving pleasure to the child.

As for Teresina, her only puzzle was to know what to admire most: the mountains on her right, or the

hanging-gardens with their fragrant lemon-groves, and the abundance of sweet-scented flowers, marking the way to Gandria on her left. Then came the amusement of being stopped twice by the boats of the Custom-house officers, and sternly interrogated as to whether they had anything contraband. Teresina showed some flowers Colonel Corbin had brought her, but the official in cocked hat and epaulettes shrugged his shoulders and said: "That is nought," with a savage gravity which delighted the child. Colonel Corbin made a feeble joke about their having plenty of "spirits" with them, after all, if that "old grumbler" only knew it, which led to a series of blunders and explanations, as the double meaning of the word was a little above Teresina's comprehension.

It had been market-day at Porlezza, and the boats full of peasants returning thence were a fresh object of interest. Men and women, all in picturesque dresses like Antonio and Lucia, standing to row, and plying their oars to the time of a wild, melancholy chant, which they sang with bright, smiling faces, their brown eyes and white teeth sparkling and gleaming the while. Their boats were all covered with wooden frameworks, over which many had laid fresh green boughs instead of an awning. This added greatly to the effect of the scene.

Teresina had never seen anything at all like the gorge of Osteno before; but several similar ones of greater or less grandeur are to be met with in different parts of Switzerland.

Whilst Antonio remained in his boat, Colonel Corbin, Lucia, and Teresina stepped into another,

which was square and flat-bottomed, like the lid of a box turned topsy-turvey. A fisher-lad, wearing a red cap, the point of which hung down and ended in a tassel, took a boat-hook and guided them through the many windings leading between towering masses of dark rock to the end of the gorge, where the white spray of a small waterfall besprinkled them, greatly to Teresina's delight; and Colonel Corbin pointed out to her the maiden-hair fern and fresh green moss peering over the edge of the precipice, and a narrow streak of blue sky, which smiled on them through the cleft in the rocks overhead.

"Oh, Colonel Corbin, if you only knew how much pleasure you are giving us!" cried Teresina, "*non è vero*, Balia?" (Is it not true, Balia?)

"*Si, si*," answers Lucia, nodding her head, as if she thoroughly understood; and there was certainly one thing she fully comprehended, namely, that her dear *signorina* was happy, and that knowledge sufficed for her.

Colonel Corbin stroked his moustaches, and said, with his peculiar little laugh, he was very, very glad to hear it. But his thoughts were inclined to wander far, far away into Germany, as there came before him the memory of a heavy boat on the Neckar, and a still childish face bearing a great resemblance to that of the little one now smiling so happily at his side.

Just then the boat once more reached the entrance of the gorge, and as the three stepped out of it on to the grass, a bare-footed boy, whose patched jacket would have defied the keenest discerner to say what had been its original colour, came running up, breathless, to the fisher-lad, and with many gesticulations, and repeatedly

pointing to the sky, said something in the dialect of the country.

The fisher-boy nodded his head, and turned to consult Lucia.

Colonel Corbin at once thought it must be about the weather, and then saw a tiny cloud, which he had noticed on landing at Osteno, had gained rapidly in size during the time they had spent in visiting the gorge; still, he did not think it looked very threatening. However, Teresina said:

"The fishermen fear there will be a heavy storm, and Antonio has sent to beg us to make haste."

They hurried to the shore, and found Antonio looking out for them; he gave an ominous glance at Lucia, but only shrugged his shoulders in reply to a question which Colonel Corbin put to him through Teresina, and said, who could tell, it might pass over; but if the storm came it would be terrible, and the Madonna and all the blessed saints have mercy upon them. So they had better make haste.

All three having taken their seats, Antonio seized the oars and began to pull lustily homewards.

It would take fully two hours and a half to get back, and it was now six o'clock, and if the weather held it would be very fortunate. For the first hour Antonio's sinister prophecy seemed likely to remain unfulfilled. The storm appeared disposed to blow over; and Teresina for one moment quite forgot it, so intent was she on breaking off one by one the petals of some large daisies which she had gathered near the grotto.

"Oh, Mr. Corbin, have you ever tried this? Balia

says it always comes true; and so I like to try it with everyone whom I wish to love me: for the flowers are seldom so cruel as to finish up at 'not at all,' when there is only that one unkind thing to so many pretty words. Now, I will try for you."

Colonel Corbin could not refrain from smiling at this frank simplicity, but said:

"Yes, Teresina, you must try for both of us in turn. At home we do it mostly with pips of apples, leastways, that was so when I was a boy. I know there was something about 'four I love with all my heart, and five I cast away.' That was the end; I forget how the verse began."

"Why, that is very like what we say in Italian: '*di cuore, con amore,*' and so on. But now I am beginning quite seriously, so you must not talk till I have done."

And the child set zealously to work at her little act of destruction, repeating a simple Italian verse half-aloud.

"There," she exclaimed, triumphantly, as she threw down the poor little stalk stripped of all but its yellow centre, "that is right: you love me with all your heart. And now would you like to know if I love you?"

"Certainly; it would be quite incomplete without that."

"Well, let us see. How very odd," she added, as the second daisy was sacrificed, "it is the same—*di cuore.* That is nice; so now we shall always be good friends. Now, you know, to make it true, you ought to keep the bits of the flowers, some people say."

"Very well," said Colonel Corbin, with mock gravity; and, tearing a leaf from his pocket-book,

picked up some of the petals scattered on Teresina's knee, and folded them carefully up in it.

"There, now as long as you keep them, it will prove true; but I dare say you will lose them," exclaimed Teresina.

"No, no I shall not. I will write on them what they are, and also their meaning. I wonder if I shall manage the Italian properly?"

"Oh yes, you will," said Teresina, delighted at what seemed to her quite an important document. "Put your name and mine together, then underneath, '*si amano di cuore.*' That will do for both."

"I will put my name, and you had better add yours and the date."

"Very well;" and, taking the pencil, the little girl wrote slowly, and with a good deal of difficulty, in a round, childish hand, beneath Colonel Corbin's bold signature, the words:

"Teresina Loretti, *si amano di cuore*, July 6th, 186–."

"*Signore, signore, vedete*" (look), cried Antonio, and pointed to the sky, where dark threatening-looking clouds were gathering thick and fast.

In an instant Colonel Corbin had replaced his notebook in his pocket, and seizing a spare pair of oars, which lay at the bottom of the boat, did his utmost to increase their speed.

Heavy drops of rain were falling, and Lucia, throwing her skirt over her head, drew Teresina into her arms, and heaped up the rugs to protect the child from the wet.

"Holy Virgin, pity us!" cried the nurse.

It was a mighty tempest, such as words would fail to describe. Flash on flash of lightning lit up the sky; clap after clap of thunder resounded through the air, rendered a thousand times more awful by being echoed by the mountains round. It would have been hard to recognise the peaceful lake of a few hours before in the angry waters blood-red from the reflection of the sky, through which the little boat was now making its way in solitude.

Other pleasure-seekers had been nearer home, or had lent a more ready ear to the fishermen's warnings; the market boats, too, had put ashore long since at their respective villages. But just now it was impossible to land. First, the small headland formed by the arm of the lake must be passed ere reaching Castagnola, the hamlet which forms the landing-place for Ruvigliano. It is no easy matter. Teresina nestles, pale and frightened, as closely as possible into Lucia's arms; the latter prays, screams, invokes all the saints in the calendar, and only the stern look on Colonel Corbin's face induces her to keep her seat.

"Oh, Blessed Mary, Joseph, *Santa Elizabetta, Santa Teresa,* have pity on us!" cries the frightened woman. "We are all good Catholics, children of the true faith. I vow a beautiful wax-light to each of you, if ye will but save us."

Suddenly it strikes Lucia that though she counts Teresina as a child of Rome, yet the assertion regarding the undividedness of their religion was rather rash. The American *signore* is probably a heretic, and with an appealing look at Colonel Corbin, she addresses an eager question to him to that effect. Milton does not

understand; but, wishing to soothe her, as she might greatly add to their peril by getting more excited, calls out encouragingly: "Yes, yes," and rows away with redoubled vigour.

His face is blanched, but it is needless to say fear has no part in this change; the over-exertion is doing him great harm. Still he heeds not fatigue; the child under his care must be brought safely ashore; the battle with the angry elements must be fought to the utmost.

The brave men conquer at length; the dangerous headland is past, and amid numbers of eager watchers, who, despite the heavy rain, have come to look out for the missing boat, they land at Castagnola in safety.

It is after nine o'clock; darkness is coming on; and for the last half-hour the toiling rowers have been obliged to seek their way chiefly by the uncertain guidance of the flashes which from moment to moment light up the heavens. Pushing his way through the crowd, an old man clasps Teresina in his arms, exclaiming in Italian:

"God be praised, my own little girl is safe."

Teresina takes Colonel Corbin's hand and says:

"Yes, Amico; but thank *him* too."

The soldier, ever a man of deeds rather than words, is reluctant at this praise and notice, and, knowing the child is safe and well cared for, excuses himself by saying his clothes are wet and he must return to his hotel to change. He has again been instrumental in saving this little one with eyes like his long-lost Elsie; but this time at no slight cost to himself. The exertion and anxiety were far too great. On reaching

his room, the tell-tale red drops on his lips warn him of much suffering yet in store.

CHAPTER VI.

A DOUBLE DISCOVERY.

MR. OBADIAH TWIRL and his newly-made friends soon parted company, whether on account of faults on both sides, or simply from misunderstandings, is a mere matter of opinion. Mr. Twirl had no malicious intentions about seeking to engage Miss Jemima Gingham's affections, and then leave her in the lurch; his only idea was to pass the time agreeably for the moment; join for a short time, as he had often done before, a party whose plans coincided with his own, and separate again when it suited both sides. He thought all three Misses Gingham "quite pleasant." True, it rather bored him to find himself always told off with Miss Jemima, but the why and wherefore of this arrangement it never entered his head to question, and he really had no idea that the young lady was so susceptible.

All this, however, appeared in a different light to old Tom Gingham; Twirl's never-failing good-humour had somewhat thawed his ill-temper, and so, though he did not quite want that style of son-in-law, as there were three girls to find husbands for, he at length made up his mind that if Mima had lost her heart to the Yankee, said worthy might have her. His mistake was never to have thought of the possibility

of Mr. Twirl's not being willing to play the part assigned him in this little affair. Mrs. Gingham's desire that the match should take place is already known to us; Miss Jemima's feelings alone remain to be explained. She was on matrimony intent; and the sooner an opportunity offered for entering its bonds, the better she would be pleased. A husband she wished to have, and therefore pinned her faith to the proverb of a bird in the hand being worth two in the bush.

Most tourists who have been to Verona agree on one point: it is that the surroundings of Juliet's tomb, as well as the hideous stone trough itself, where her remains are said to have lain, are calculated to dispel all romantic illusions the visitor may have sought to conjure up for the occasion. It therefore really redounds to the credit of Miss Jemima's poetical and imaginative powers, that she recited with marvellous promptitude some appropriate lines from Shakespeare, as the party met together in the chapel of the old Franciscan monastery where the sarcophagus rests. Though very sleepy, she had learnt it by heart, at the cost of an hour's rest, the night before.

> "Dost thou love me? I know thou wilt say 'Ay;'
> And I will take thy word: yet if thou swear'st
> Thou mayst prove false; at lovers' perjuries,
> They say, Jove laughs. O gentle Romeo,
> If thou dost love, pronounce it faithfully.
> Or if thou think'st I am too quickly won,
> I'll frown, and be perverse, and say thee nay,
> So thou wilt woo: but else not for the world."

It was hard that such a tragic utterance, the fruit of

so much labour, should meet with no other response from Mr. Twirl than:

"Wal, Miss Mima, I calc'late yer a perfect Fanny Kemble."

Flattering though the compliment was, Miss Jemima would willingly have dispensed with it to have seen a trace of emotion in the speaker's face, or have felt him press her hand gently and call himself her Romeo; for such was the scene her fancy had pictured. Disappointment took possession of her soul, and that evening she wept copiously on her mother's neck. Mrs. Gingham guessed the cause of her grief, and was full of sympathy, and even provided with some tears to mingle with her daughter's. Prudence, however, suggested not spoiling matters by premature action, and the wise matron preached patience.

But, unfortunately, hotel walls being inconveniently thin, the ex-mayor overheard their lamentations, and insisted on the reason of this sorrow being explained to him. He abominated women's tears; so, to silence them, and at the same time satisfy his own feelings, demanded an interview with Mr. Twirl, who appeared without delay. When, in a voice that showed no trifling was admissible, the good man asked Mr. Twirl his intentions regarding his daughter Jemima, the latter could only reply:

"I calc'late, sir, they would be strictly honourable, if I had any; but really I happen to have none."

Scarcely had the words escaped his lips, before an iron grasp was laid on his collar, and, in less than a second Mr. Twirl found himself deposited outside the door. Shaking himself, and by no means discomposed,

he murmured: "Confound the provoking old cuss!" and straightway went to order his supper.

Next day he started alone for the Dolomite region, but ere leaving, entered the hotel dining-room, where Mrs. Gingham and two of her daughters were seated at breakfast; and as if nothing had occurred, said, with the most polite bow:

"Ladies, ere starting I would wish you all a very good morning."

So he went, mentally vowing not to join retired English tradesmen and their families again; for they were "right down funny" in their ideas.

Mr. Gingham engaged a courier to escort himself and family on the rest of their triumphal progress through the Continent; but as none of the party were very *au fait* of foreign geography, the ex-mayor felt he incurred no risk of being found out, though privately bribing the man to pioneer them on the road back towards England as soon as possible. The strategy succeeded, and we may hope with all seriousness that the retired dispenser of dips, his wife and daughters, felt more in their element, once safe back at Candleton, than whilst being given out abroad as *milord* and *miladies*, and proportionately fleeced.

Now let us return for a brief space to Ruvigliano. Signor Loretti's sudden return had a serious effect on Lucia's destiny; for when the first delight of having Teresina safe had been repeatedly expressed, the old picture-dealer made a thorough investigation of the whole matter, and expressed his displeasure both at their making acquaintances in his absence, and going on the water. Teresina told the story most accurately,

and how they should never have known Colonel Corbin but for his having come to her rescue in the first instance; and Lucia said what a perfect gentleman he was, so polite and kind, and how his visits had served to beguile many an hour which Teresina might otherwise have found tedious.

Signor Loretti said he was very grateful to Colonel Corbin for all his kindness; but at the same time, as the child had twice been in danger during his absence, he could feel no longer that it was safe to leave her with Lucia, and therefore, when he returned with Teresina to Milan in the autumn, the latter must remain behind at her native place, or make any other arrangement, which suited her. But the child must have some one else to look after her. This unexpected announcement caused the nurse and her dear foster-child to shed many tears; no pleading, however, could alter the old man's decision.

"Amico always keeps his word, thou knowest, *Teresina mia!*" was his reply; "therefore ask not again, child." And she did not.

It was certainly better for her, now she was already twelve years old, to be with a more educated woman, and feeling this made the picture-dealer remain firm. Lucia's sorrow was very real; but time brought healing to the wound in the shape of Antonio, the fisherman.

People had not been quite wrong in saying he was an old love. Long before she first went to Milan to service he had admired his comely relation, only he was a poor lad then; now he was doing well as a fisherman, and had inherited a nice house and garden; he also drove a thriving business by keeping an *albergo*, where

the neighbouring villagers met on *festas*, and refreshed themselves with the light wine of the country and cakes made with nuts from the pine trees. Fortunately, the cousinship was not so near as that Holy Church was likely to disapprove; and Antonio, encouraged by kindly glances he had received on the day of the expedition to Osteno, thought the time had come to try his luck. His advances were received favourably, and ere long they had plighted their troth. The promise to be allowed to go to the wedding, and the prospect of her dear Balia being thoroughly happy, served also to cheer Teresina.

Signor Loretti considered it a necessary act of politeness to call on Colonel Corbin the following day, and thank him for his general kindness to Teresina, as well as for the gallant way in which he rescued her on two occasions. Milton could not receive any one, being very seriously indisposed, the waiter declared. On repeating his visit in the course of a week, at Teresina's earnest request, Signor Loretti saw Colonel Corbin's own servant, an intelligent Irishman, who was devotedly attached to his master.

"Yes, the Colonel," Pat loved to emphasize Milton's military title, "has been very ill," he said, in fairly comprehensible French: "*il a craché du sang.*"

And then Signor Loretti learnt the whole story; for when Pat had an opportunity of expatiating on the Colonel's heroism, he was not likely to leave any part untold. So the picture-dealer was made aware how Colonel Corbin had received a severe gunshot wound as he sought to cut his way through a portion of the rebel army, with a few followers, when on a mission of

trust to his general; how Pat had nursed him through the long illness that followed, and Colonel Corbin was now travelling for his health; and, finally, how the severe exertion of trying to pull ashore at Castagnola the night of the storm had proved too much for him, and caused a slight attack of hæmorrhage. Pat wound up by promising faithfully to tell his master how much Signor Loretti wished to see and thank him for his kindness, and to inquire when the old gentleman could be admitted. Not many days later, Colonel Corbin sent to ask if Signor Loretti would do him the pleasure of calling, and the request was at once complied with.

Milton was seated in an armchair, looking rather haggard, but insisted on making an effort to rise and receive his visitor, who besought him to remain seated. Signor Loretti, though expressing himself in a quaint fashion, was quite capable of carrying on a conversation in English, and when, after spending a pleasant half hour, he took leave of Colonel Corbin, it was with the conviction that the latter was undoubtedly the thorough gentleman that Lucia had declared him to be, and made up his mind to bring Teresina to see him, as they both much wished. Colonel Corbin was obliged to keep within the gardens of the hotel for another fortnight; but the imprisonment was not very irksome. Signor Loretti called often, and proved a good talker as well as a man of both deep and widespread learning. Nor must we, in justice, omit mentioning the never-failing good-nature with which the little baroness sought to help Milton while away the hours of convalescence; though the length and number of her stories may sometimes have fatigued him.

But Milton's intense love for children, added to the special interest he took in Teresina, made those occasions the pleasantest when she was allowed to accompany the picture-dealer on his visits. He never tired of listening to her merry talk, shrewd remarks, and knowledge on many subjects beyond her years, together with a strange admixture of ignorance of quite elementary branches of learning. Though Milton had been idle at Heidelberg, he had made up for it in a great measure by reading much later in life, and by intercourse with some of the most highly-cultivated men and women of his own country; he had also taste for music and painting.

Adjoining the Hotel du Parc stood the old convent church of Santa Maria degli Angioli, famed for Luini's wonderful fresco of the Passion and Crucifixion, to visit which, Colonel Corbin, as soon as he felt able, promised Teresina. One balmy evening, to the child's intense delight, he declared himself ready to go.

Chivalry and reverence are very near akin, and Milton never entered a church without a distinct feeling that he was indeed treading on holy ground. He was not one of those who, visiting Roman Catholic countries, enter the national places of worship only to pity and condemn, or, with pharisaical haughtiness, fling an "I protest" at what they denounce as gross idolatry and superstition; whilst fondly attached to his own pure branch of the Catholic Church, he yet was broad in his sympathies. It touched his heart to see the aisles crowded with kneeling peasant worshippers, whose lowly demeanour and intense earnestness spoke of a deep, fervent faith, while their frequent pre-

sence, both for public and private devotion, showed that the Church was indeed the home of the people. Milton cared far less for a great function on some high day, when pomp, display, and ritual were at their height, when the robing and unrobing of bishops and saluting of ecclesiastical dignitaries formed a large part of the ceremony; but he loved to see some poor labouring man or woman snatch a few moments from the daily toil to kneel before the altar in the calm stillness of some church, where petty cares, with their power to distract, could not press so close, and then go out once more to face life's work with a heart eased of some burden, or else with fresh strength to bear it.

There were but few worshippers at Santa Maria degli Angioli when Colonel Corbin entered with Signor Loretti and Teresina, and these were mostly praying at a side-altar, so that the picture-dealer's few remarks, made in an undertone, pointing out the special features of the picture, were not likely to disturb them. Teresina's reverent manner, and the look of love in her large eyes as she gazed on the image of the Crucified, touched Milton's heart, as did the simple way in which both she and Signor Loretti knelt side by side for a few moments ere leaving the building. He took the holy water which she offered him with a feeling that, whatever its virtue might or might not be, the faith of the little one must silence all scoffing now; and yet the wish crossed his mind that this child, who loved the English language so dearly, had been taught to lisp "Our Father" in the Saxon tongue, instead of strange-sounding Latin, and been brought up in the sound doctrines of the English Church.

"That is a very beautiful picture, Colonel Corbin," said Signor Loretti. "We Italians have reason to be well content with our wealth of art. Is it not so, *cara mia*?" he added, patting Teresina on the shoulder, with a proud look in his handsome old face.

"Yes, Amico; you always say no other nation has such painters," answered Teresina, placing her little hand confidingly in the old man's.

"Are you devoted heart and soul to Italy, Teresina?" asked Colonel Corbin.

"Certainly — certainly," replied Signor Loretti quickly for her, as if fearing she might not give the answer he wished. "See, she always remains true to her flag." And he pointed to the sash of Italian colours, which he always liked her to wear.

"Yet she speaks English so well, and has not eyes like an Italian; sometimes I fancy she cannot be entirely of southern race."

"She is Amico's own little girl," was the somewhat brusque reply; and Signor Loretti at once changed the subject.

Notwithstanding this rebuff, fortune smiled on Colonel Corbin that day. Returning to the hotel gardens, the little girl tripped when running across a grass-plot, and let fall a locket, which opened, letting drop an ivory miniature. Colonel Corbin stooped to pick it up, and at once recognised it as a likeness of Elsie Hardwicke, just as he had known her. He returned it to Teresina without a word, having been quick-sighted enough to observe that the picture-dealer looked vexed at the incident. But the little girl, in her joy at finding it uninjured, said:

"Oh, mother, mother! what should I have done if your dear little picture had been broken?"

Slaney Claughton had taken care to talk to his child reverently of her mother, and how dearly he had loved her, and desired that she should always wear her picture to keep her memory fresh.

This discovery was a great surprise to Colonel Corbin, despite all his cogitations and the likeness he had found to Elsie Hardwicke in Teresina, and it naturally gave him much to think of. He was very eager to hear all about Elsie: whether she had indeed married Claughton; what had become of her and her husband; where her father was; and why her child was being brought up as an Italian by that strange old man. Yet no one had a greater horror than Milton of inquiring into other people's domestic concerns, especially when they were as unwilling to be communicative concerning them as Signor Loretti appeared to be. A battle ensued between his extreme diffidence and eagerness to know the fate of the girl he had loved so dearly; and victory seemed likely to be on the side of silence had he not received a letter the following morning which proved a powerful incentive to seek further information. Said letter was from Mr. Twirl, and ran as follows:

"Gasthaus zum Goldenen Adler,
"C——,
"R—— Thal.

"*July* 23, 186—.

"DEAR CORBIN,—

"The dry-goods business proved a bubble speculation, though, indeed, your humble servant was as

innocent as a new-born babe in his line of conduct. But 'Pa' thought otherwise, and so we parted company. I trust Mima may find a more worthy Romeo, though not a Jack Sprat, for her powers of manducation will, if you will pardon the quotation, be perfectly equal to 'licking' any 'platter clean' unassisted. The dear creature consumed an entire Bologna sausage on the occasion of our last luncheon in common. But enough of this harrowing subject. Being a little thrown out in my plans, I determined to seek for adventures and fresh botanical specimens, both of which my soul delights in, in this *terra incognita*, the Dolomite region. It is a delightful place of sojourn, where, if often housed in a barn, one is feasted like a prince for about three francs a day. I calculate, my dear Corbin, you are exercising your mental faculties endeavouring to discover what the object of this epistle may be, seeing it is the first time I have ever written you in my life. Well, to the point, then: I have come across traces of a very surprising nature, and likely to interest you even more than they do me. My worthy host, Peter Klupsel, whom I have been staying with for more than a week, and accompanied on several excursions, is remarkably fond of relating stories of his experiences as a guide. Amongst other adventures, he told me the story of two Englishmen who arrived at his hostelry late one evening in September, three years ago, and wished to seek a track, the following morning, leading into the A—— Valley, which is renowned for its picturesque scenery. This track was well known to Peter; but even he, the hardiest mountaineer, judged it dangerous to attempt excepting in really fine

weather, for it led for some distance along a shelving ledge of rock on the brink of an abyss. It was therefore of the utmost consequence to see one's way clearly. Peter described the strangers as being one a tall, fair man, this side of forty, and the other as short, and considerably older, with broad shoulders and a fine beard. The older man said he was an artist, and showed a book full of sketches of these parts to the Tyrolese seated in our *table d'hôte* room—viz., an open shed with rough wooden tables and benches adjoining the skittle-ground. Peter and a young fellow named Caspar Rainer expressed themselves willing to act as guides to the Englishmen; only Klupsel made the stipulation that they should turn back if the weather proved threatening. The morning seemed promising, and they started off in excellent spirits. But soon Peter declared his belief that the '*berggeist*' (mountain sprite) meant to play them a trick. Ere long there were unmistakable signs of there being only too good reason to fear the fatal mist. The younger stranger was inclined to Peter's view; but the elder was vexed and declared his determination to proceed. This led to a rather warm discussion between the artist and the guides. At length it was arranged, as the former persisted in crossing the pass, that his friend should go with him, and also Caspar, who was a young bachelor on matrimony intent, and tempted by the double pay offered him. But Peter, being a married man with a large family, would not undertake the risk, and returned home, which he already found difficult to do, the fog became so thick. The Englishmen and Caspar Rainer never reached the A——

Valley, nor could anything further be heard of them. It was, however, beyond doubt that they met their death amidst the fathomless depths of the abyss. Just at the most dangerous part, where it is necessary to cling to the side of the rock to turn a corner, the path having crumbled away, Peter, who went with two trusty friends to seek the lost men, found a short brown pipe mounted in silver, which he remembered having seen in the artist's hand.

"'Was this all?' I asked mine host.

"'Nay,' he answered; 'from a little way over the side of the precipice, one of my companions fished up what seemed a fragment of a pocket made of the same large-patterned cloth as the younger Englishman's coat, and with it a small book bound in leather. I can easily show them to you,' he added; 'my wife keeps them in the big press with her Sunday gown and boddice. And that is all we ever knew of them. God rest their souls. The strangers' names I never learnt, though they wrote them in Caspar's certificate-book when they made their bargain; but that perished with him. We of course let the authorities know; but things are done more slowly in these parts to what they are in busy towns; and as we had no means of identifying them, it was impossible to let the gentlemen's friends know. Thus the matter ended.'

"Though Peter's story finished here, I calculate the pith of mine is just coming for you, Corbin. Mine host fulfilled his promise of showing me the pipe and book; and I examined both carefully, not without result. With my pocket magnifying-glass, which I always have at hand for classifying botanical speci-

mens, I found a scarcely discernible V.H., scratched apparently with a pen-knife, on the pipe. The little book was one of the English Common Prayer; on the flyleaf, traced in half-obliterated ink, I made out the words; 'Slaney, from his loving wife Elsie.'

"Now, my dear Corbin, make what you can of this discovery. I should be real glad to know where Mrs. Claughton is. Poor woman, she must feel badly about her husband, and wondering as to his fate. I must bring this long letter to an end now, I calculate, and remain

"Yours to command,
"OBADIAH TWIRL."

CHAPTER VII.

A SUDDEN JOURNEY.

MILTON read through Mr. Twirl's letter most carefully, and immediately began again and went through it a second time. Then he wrote a note to Signor Loretti, and despatched Pat with it to Ruvigliano. The latter returned ere very long with the answer, that the Signore would certainly call on Colonel Corbin the following day, as he desired. This he did, and a long explanation followed, in which our hero learnt with deep sorrow that Teresina had been motherless from her birth. The picture-dealer was also deeply grieved at his two friends' untimely fate; but he had long felt sure that they must have met with death in some strange shape, or news of them would have reached

him. He at once communicated with both the Milanese and Austrian authorities, and they being satisfied that the decease of Messrs. Hardwicke and Claughton was sufficiently proved, the latter's will was opened, and it was found that Signor Loretti was appointed Teresina's sole guardian. Of course all was left to her. No difficulties presented themselves, as the money was in the hands of a most reliable Milanese banker, Mr. Claughton having placed it there during the first winter he spent in Italy. Hardwicke had nothing to leave; it had always been his way to spend what he had.

But in relating how these matters came to be settled, I am anticipating events a little, and must look back to see what happened. After Colonel Corbin had communicated the contents of Mr. Twirl's letter to the picture-dealer, he asked permission to tell Teresina that he had known both her parents, and Signor Loretti agreed to this, and also thought it advisable to acquaint her with the facts of her father and grandfather's death, as well that he himself remained her sole protector, nothing whatever being known of her English relatives. Mr. Hardwicke had told his old friend repeatedly that he had none of his own, and never communicated with his wife's; also that his son-in-law's father had behaved very badly about Elsie's marriage, and would have nothing more to do with his son. As to Slaney, he never was known to say a word on the subject.

"Is it not delicious, Amico," cried Teresina when the news was told her, "that Colonel Corbin knew my dear parents? He says I am so like mother, and father wished me to be so. Loving and lovable he always said she was. He called her his Sunbeam; that means

something very bright, of course. It must be nice to be a sunbeam, and bring light to people and make them happy. I would so like to be one!"

The two who listened to this little speech thought Teresina's wish was unconsciously fulfilled. What would Signor Loretti's life have been but for his own little girl imparting some of her brightness to it? Doubtless it would have been for the most part filled with dark-grey shadows, like the old house in Milan. One of Teresina's audience heaved a secret sigh; he was a lonely man: his sisters married; his father grown irritable with increasing gout and age; what would he not have given for such a ray of light to gladden his path?

Signor Loretti wisely forebore to pain the child's tender heart by telling her in aught but the briefest possible way of how her father and grandfather had perished; at her age nought is thoroughly real but the present, and she had long been familiar with the thought that those two dear ones could not return to her again. The tears which sprang to her eyes at the confirmation of the news of their death, were soon dried in the delight and joy of finding this new friend was one whom she might look on, as she said, "as an old friend, after all." Balia must be informed of this wonderful news; and she was. But Lucia was very taken up with her own affairs just then. Antonio declared he had waited for happiness long enough, and three weeks from thence must be the wedding-day. Lucia said she could not leave her young charge till the latter started for Milan. However, Antonio arranged that even after their marriage his wife might

remain at Ruvigliano, whilst the house at Castagnola was being repaired. So that difficulty was satisfactorily got over, and the *signore*, Teresina, and Colonel Corbin all promised to be at the wedding.

On the eve of the eventful day, Colonel Corbin went to Ruvigliano, at Teresina's special request, to see the presents for the happy couple, to which he added a purse with five hundred francs in gold, and promised to be back precisely at nine o'clock next morning, the time when the solemnity was to take place.

At the hour named, however, he was seated in the Luino diligence and trying to make out how he could get quickest to Liverpool and embark for America. A note with farewells and excuses was all that went to Ruvigliano. His father's house of business had suffered less than most others from the war; but now sudden difficulties made it in danger of being forced to stop payment. And as the senior partner's health had been giving way during the last few months, his son's presence was earnestly desired by the rest of the firm. For the second time in his life a telegraphic summons from Whitburn Corbin required Milton to make a hasty journey at a moment when he little cared to do so. Of course there was no case of love such as before; but still Colonel Corbin greatly disliked being forced to put so many thousand miles between himself and these newly-made friends, just when recent revelations had made them doubly interesting in his eyes. Added to that, he was scarcely well enough to travel.

Signor Loretti was very sorry on his own account at Colonel Corbin's being forced to leave; but a great deal more so for the bitter disappointment he felt sure it would

be to Teresina. The child could not understand why her American friend did not come as he had promised to the wedding; and hoped and hoped that he might appear at last to lead off the dance with her in the tent; but as he did not come, she had to content herself with a turn with Antonio, who left his new-made wife for a brief space on seeing the intense look of disappointment on the child's pretty face. Everyone said it was a pretty sight to watch the muscular, athletic figure of the handsome fisherman in his *festa* garb dancing with the slim, fragile-looking child dressed in soft white muslin. This dance, and then the fun of watching the jumping, dodging of partners, some of the lads whirling their partners round and giving them a little jerk into the air as the finale to the figure, all served to divert Teresina for awhile, and as long as Amico would allow her to stay, she watched the proceedings with unflagging interest and delight. But next morning, when her guardian drew her gently to him, and told her how their friend had been forced to go home across the wide ocean, her tears fell thick and fast, and day by day she put up a little fervent prayer for his safety and return.

Peter Klupsel, the guide, declared his great wish to have Mr. Hardwicke's short pipe, as a keepsake in memory of that fatal expedition. But when told that Slaney Claughton had left a little orphan daughter, whose mother had given him the morocco prayer-book, the good Tyrolese at once requested Mr. Twirl to take both to her, as he purposed returning to Lugano.

Signor Loretti and Teresina readily welcomed the man who had found out what the fate of the latter's

father and grandfather had been, and come from the place where they had halted on the eve of their ill-fated expedition. On the occasion of this visit, Mr. Twirl showed himself in the very best light. His bravado, off-hand manners, and all that caused him generally to be considered rather obnoxious, were atoned for by the genuine good feeling he evinced when repeating the sad story he had heard from the lips of Peter Klupsel. With her father's prayer-book, he also brought Teresina a little bunch of *edelweiss* gathered on the mountain-side near where Messrs. Claughton and Hardwicke had halted with the guides to partake of their last meal ere separating, Peter Klupsel to return to his home, the others to make the foolhardy attempt to cross the pass and find death awaiting them. Mr. Twirl, his head ever full of fresh plans for journeys or mountaineering, only remained a few days at Lugano. Now Colonel Corbin was gone, he had no old acquaintances there, so having fulfilled his little errand of kindness, he started off on a long tour across the St. Gothard and Furca, down to Visp and Zermatt. There let us bid him farewell for awhile. We may rely on his turning up again some day, when we least expect it, for that is what all his acquaintances say he does; when one person hears of him in Switzerland, some one else has seen him in Spain, or if M—— is sure he is exploring Norway, N——'s particular correspondent speaks of meeting him at the Pyramids.

Teresina dearly cherished her father's little prayer-book, and the possession and perusal of it awoke in her the wish to know something more of this faith of her own people. Hitherto she had never been present at

any form of worship but that of Rome, and Signor Loretti had been well content that it should be so. This was not through bigotry, but from the same motive we have had occasion once or twice to observe in him before, namely, a jealous shrinking from anything which should not serve to identify her with his country and nation. But he had a conscience, and therefore, though with some reluctance, consented, when Teresina told him, again and again, that she would like once to be permitted to be present at the English service in the little chapel attached to the Hotel du Parc, where German Lutherans and Anglicans in turn addressed their petitions to the throne of grace, in the form dearest to their consciences.

Lugano is generally fortunate in its chaplains; this year, particularly, the English visitors were unanimous in praise of their clergyman's hearty thoroughness and the peacefulness of the short daily service ere the morning freshness had given way to the heat of midday. This chaplain, who was abroad for a short holiday after over-exerting himself in London, we have met in his own church at home, for it was Francis Power, the earnest preacher whose heart-stirring words had fallen, not unfruitfully, on the ear of Eustace Claughton, Teresina's paternal grandfather.

As the little girl could not go unattended, Signor Loretti had no alternative but to accompany her; for Lucia would have deemed it necessary to perform countless pilgrimages and penances to purify her soul from the unavoidable taint of heresy such an act would entail upon it. One bright Sunday morning, Antonio, in his *festa* dress, with the white awning and gay flag

decking his boat, conveyed the old *signore* and Teresina across the waters from Castagnola to the landing close by the afore-mentioned chapel. Signor Loretti was above the middle height and well built—once he had been noticeable for his erect carriage and firm gait; now age had somewhat bent his frame and enfeebled his steps; but, in spite of many furrows, his fine old face was still very attractive, with its broad, noble-looking forehead, dark eyes beaming with benevolence, and long white beard. To many of the young artists whom he befriended, Loretti had served as model for a St. Peter; more than one person in the congregation on this Sunday morning cast an interested glance at the handsome old man and the pretty child, who looked up so confidingly in his face, with her small fingers resting on his waxen, withered hand, as, the prayers over, they sat listening to the words of the preacher. Teresina found some difficulty at first in following the sermon, as most people do when hearing for the first time a public discourse in a language with which they may be otherwise tolerably familiar. But the eager, impressionable child felt how every word which fell from the preacher's lips found a full echo in his heart, and that he truly loved and reverenced Him to whom she, too, yielded the gold and frankincense and myrrh of pure and intense devotion. Thanks to having repeatedly looked through her father's prayer-book, she was able to take part in the prayers, which Mr. Power read clearly and simply, with no attempt at the so-called fine reading which so frequently jars on the ear of those who do not want to be impressed, but to pray. Then the hymns pleased Teresina greatly; and alto-

gether, though she could not exactly put it into words, the heartiness and unity of the service, people and priest joining their petitions together, attracted the child used to the less congregational Romish system.

Signor Loretti felt gratified at Teresina's being pleased, and, liking the chaplain, not only consented to take her to the English service as often as she liked, but also allowed her to be present at the catechising on Sunday afternoons. In this way she learnt much about the faith of her fathers, and grew to love it for its purity and grand Catholicity, which Mr. Power himself held so dear; and which to the child brought up to believe implicitly in the necessity for an apostolic and historic Church, had attractions no mere sect could ever have possessed. This attachment grew and strengthened, taking deep root in Teresina's warm heart, so full of capabilities of loving.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN EUROPE, ONCE MORE.

THANKS to the caution and judiciousness of the leading partners, the firm of Corbin, Redfern, and Co. passed unscathed through the crisis; but it had been a time of the utmost anxiety to all concerned, and told specially on Mr. Whitburn Corbin, whose health gave way completely. The New York world was therefore not surprised to learn, in the course of the succeeding year, that they had to mourn the loss of a distinguished

fellow-citizen, and the great banking-house of its senior partner.

The strain of business, together with his father's death, had also nearly undone the good Colonel Corbin had derived from his tour; and now the doctors assured him, if he wished to prolong his life, he must bid business a lasting farewell and once more cross the ocean. Dearly as he loved his country, circumstances helped to reconcile him to this advice. His three sisters were all married; the two eldest to fellow-countrymen, and Gertie, the youngest, her brother's favourite, to an English baronet, Sir Ralph Brandon, who owned a large estate in D——shire. The old home in Fifth Avenue was therefore quite deserted now, and to live in enforced idleness, whilst all his friends were busily employed, gave him a painful feeling of being laid on the shelf before his time.

All that was yet necessary to make him obey the doctors was done by a loving little note from Gertie:

"Brandon Court, Wideford,
"D——shire,
"May 3rd, 186—.

"DEAREST BROTHER,—

"Ralph says he feels sure that D——shire would suit you admirably; and I quite agree with him, and am certain the climate would be just the thing for you. Indeed, on that point you can suit yourself, for some parts are mild, others bracing. We have roses and ferns, too, worthy of Mentone and Cannes, and are without their dust and glare. I shall deem it 'real mean of you' if you do not pay us a long visit; and we will make a yachting trip to the Scilly Islands, where, I am told, palms, aloes, and geraniums abound

in tropical profusion. I will not say good-bye, but *au revoir*, for we expect you by the next Cunard.

"Your very loving sister,

"GERTRUDE BRANDON."

Colonel Corbin had delayed so long, that this letter found him too weak to move; but the next steamer took back the promise to Gertie to do so as soon as possible. The following summer saw the resolution carried out; and Milton spent more than a year of delicious convalescence, nursed by Gertie, partly at Brandon Court, partly yachting; for Sir Ralph dearly loved the sea, and of course, even for the sake of her beloved hero-brother, his faithful little wife could not let him go alone. The sister's loving care, complete rest, and sea breezes combined, brought the healthy bronze back to Milton's cheeks, cheering and strengthening him. Sir Ralph had taken a great fancy to his handsome, gentleman-like American brother-in-law, and thought it would be an excellent plan for him to settle down in D——shire. As it would be folly for him to attempt living in New York, Colonel Corbin rather took to the plan, but said he would only remain if he could buy a property which would give him plenty of healthy and interesting out-of-door exercise. Something exactly suitable was not so easy to find, though Sir Ralph, a very energetic man, entered most heartily into the idea, and at once made it his business to look out for a suitable purchase. Meanwhile, Colonel Corbin declared his intention of making a tour on the Continent. His versatile and well-stored mind made him love to visit spots rich in historic interest

and artistic or antiquarian treasures. Nismes, Avignon, and Arles he had long wished to see; so he purposed taking those places on the road, and then stopping awhile at different stations on the Riviera, and gradually making his way to the north of Italy, returning to England by the Mont Cenis. This he successfully accomplished; nor, as may be expected, was Milan omitted. Shortly after arriving in America, Colonel Corbin received a letter like a translation from some Oriental language, written partly in very flowery English, partly in French. It was from Signor Loretti, expressing great regret at their intercourse having been so abruptly interrupted, and hoping that whenever he came to Milan, Colonel Corbin would not forget to visit at Casa Loretti, where a warm welcome would always await him. From time to time more letters followed, in the same stiff, copper-plate writing, and one contained an enclosure in a round, childish hand, wherein Teresina told how they all had missed him at the wedding, and how proud Lucia was of the house her husband was getting ready for her. Then she went on to speak of the beauty of the lizards and butterflies, finishing up with the same petition as her guardian, not to forget to pay them a visit some day.

The last four years had naturally made a very great change in Teresina. She had grown into a slight, graceful girl. Her ideas had undergone a great change. Dancing dogs, children's games, or even lizards and insects, no longer formed her chief delight.

On returning to Milan in the autumn, after Lucia's wedding, the picture-dealer had decided to send his "little girl" to school. He did not greatly relish the

idea, for her very dissimilarity to other children pleased him; and he had a notion that little meannesses, small deceits, and acts of double-dealing, were sometimes practised at boarding-schools which would be totally foreign to Teresina's frank, honourable, straightforward character. Yet there were many needful branches of education he felt he could not supply, and it seemed scarcely right to let her grow up without any gentle woman's influence. Therefore though sadly fearing she would fret at the restraint, like a bird accustomed to be free which is suddenly encaged, he made up his mind to consult Signora Belloni, an old friend, whose opinions he held in the highest estimation, the result being that Teresina was placed under the roof of a lady at Pavia, who took pupils to educate with her own family.

The holidays Teresina always spent with Amico, either at Milan or the Lakes; and their meetings on these occasions were touching to witness. The old man, with tears in his eyes, would fold the young girl tenderly in his arms, then unclasp the hands she had lovingly fastened round his neck, and holding her at a little distance to mark how she had grown, say:

"Why, *Teresina mia*, thou art shooting up too fast. My little girl will soon be a grown-up woman," adding, with a sigh: "I wonder how much longer these old eyes will still be permitted to gaze on thee?"

Teresina's devotion to her old friend and guardian was ever the same. Of late, he often grew tired, and would lean on her arm, as they took their evening's walk by the pleasant waters of Como or Lugano, or

turned their steps towards the grand old pile where San Carlo Borromeo lies enshrined. Signor Loretti was beginning to feel that in his declining years he could not do without his dear young companion. Her seventeenth birthday had long been decided on as the day when Teresina should bid Pavia a final farewell, and once more be entirely with him. On the eventful anniversary this was done.

Together they spent the summer at Lugano, which Teresina held especially dear, for the sake of many associations, not least amongst which was the fact of having there first been instructed in the faith of her own people. It was ever her delight to frequent the services in the chapel by the lake; although she never found a clergyman again on whose words she hung with the same intense interest as Mr. Power's. The latter never knew, of course, how, in sowing "beside all waters," he had cast the good seed into the hearts of two so near akin; and, as will yet be seen, influenced the fortunes of his young catechumen at Lugano by the Lenten discourses preached in her grandfather's hearing.

This year the middle of September found Signor Loretti and his ward already back in the old Milanese house. As he grew more feeble, the picture-dealer preferred the quiet and comfort of his own home. Teresina, unselfish as ever, smilingly acquiesced in his proposal to return, though the prospect of a hot town, full of dust and glare was not inviting. Lugano, on the other hand, was in full autumn beauty: a rich variety of red and orange tints decking the hills; the sky still cloudless; the weather all that could be de-

sired. Many pleasant acquaintances still lingered there. Latterly Amico had been more willing that Teresina should hold intercourse with young people of her own age; perhaps the idea had suggested itself to him, that it was selfish to restrict a young creature ready to enjoy life to the society of an old man like himself. As it was, Teresina, who happened to find some former Pavia school-fellows in the hotel, was allowed far more freedom, and almost driven by her guardian to take part in their expeditions on the water and explorations of the neighbouring hills.

It was only reluctance to leave him, seated alone in the garden, which ever made her hesitate; for she loved boating or roving on the mountain-side, as indeed befitted a true daughter of Elsie Claughton's. On these occasions she was the life and centre of the party of girls. Those brothers and cousins who joined the merry troop fully shared their admiration for the winsome, amiable girl, with the pretty, smiling mouth and blue eyes sparkling with merriment.

In short, many a young man's heart was endangered, and more than one of Petrarch's fellow-countrymen scribbled sonnets in those happy, foolish days about *la bella Teresina*, or *l'amore*, or something equally sensible. She, whose praises they sang, never gave them a second thought, and forgot everything else in the delight of returning to Amico's side with a little offering of flowers gathered in her rambles, which her skilful fingers had arranged into a charming bouquet —showing that her dear old guardian was ever in her thoughts.

Now all these pleasant things were left behind, and

Teresina and Signor Loretti found themselves once more in the sombre old house in the midst of by no means the most pleasant part of Milan. In winter-time the artists who lodged in the upper stories, many of them agreeable, well-informed men, often dropped in of an evening. Teresina liked to hear them discuss art, politics, and other topics with Amico, who always talked well and pleasantly, thus making the conversation frequently prove really instructive, and opening a far wider field of knowledge to the young girl than generally falls to the lot of women.

Now, nearly all these friends are absent, and the many storied old house appears rather forlorn: even her own step—light enough certainly—or the sound of her sweet voice, has a strange effect on Teresina amidst all this emptiness. Any interruption to the quiet and monotony is consequently likely to prove welcome. One morning Teresina is as usual busily employed in feeding the only never-absent friends, the pigeons, her face forming a strange and pleasing contrast to the grey rugged outline of the old stone window-frame, out of which her little hands are strewing crumbs for the feast. It is a picture which must have fascinated any passer-by with the smallest taste for beauty; only there happens to be no one going by to see it: indeed, such an occurrence is most rare in the deserted streets at the present season. But one who takes a more than mere artistic delight in watching the graceful girl enters at this moment.

"Teresina, mia."

"Yes, Amico."

And she turns her head with a pretty smile.

"I have a surprise for thee. Guess what it is, my child."

"How can I? Is it that you have succeeded in purchasing the lovely picture of the Madonna and the Holy Infant in Prince Dellamagna's collection?"

"Wrong; guess again."

"Oh, Amico! Are you going to carry out your long promise of visiting that grand Certosa di Pavia with me?"

"No, little one. It is not that."

"Nay, then, I cannot guess. No ill news, I see by your face. Tell me, please, Amico," and she takes the old man's hand caressingly.

"Well, child, we are going to have a visitor; one who has long promised to come and see us."

"A visitor? Surely, not Colonel Corbin?"

"Even he, my darling."

"When, when, Amico?"

And, quite forgetful of any seventeen-year-old propriety, Teresina dances about the room, clapping her hands with delight.

"He hopes to be here to-morrow afternoon, so we must hasten to make ready for our guest, and together with a warm welcome prepare the best room for him, and bring out the antique silver table-ornaments, providing the best fare that Margherita can find in Milan, and some of my rare old wine. In the hearty reception of a traveller, come from afar, the comfort and refreshment of the body must not be forgotten. So now to thy duties, little housekeeper."

Teresina runs off at once to consult old Margherita, who has served Signor Loretti faithfully as cook and

general attendant for many a long year: and the two put their heads together to decide as to the best means of preparing to do honour to their guest. The result is that Teresina fetches her hat and runs off to order flowers and ferns from the florist, to lighten up the old house; and Margherita goes first to the tapestried spare room to lay snowy linen on the old-fashioned bed, surmounted by a crown, in which several royal personages are said at various times to have died or been born; then, having proved and found all things to her satisfaction, she trudges away to consult her cookery-book and inspect the larder.

At the expected hour Colonel Corbin arrives to find Signor Loretti looking older, and far less erect than when they were together five years ago at Lugano, and instead of his child-friend a graceful girl, almost the exact counterpart of the lovable Elsie Hardwicke, who had taken his youthful heart by storm; but with more depth of character to be read in her face than her mother ever possessed.

Flowers fill the valuable *épergne* of rare design which Loretti has produced to deck the dining-table; flowers again, with sprays of maidenhair fern gracefully interspersed, adorn the room destined for Colonel Corbin; and an English "welcome," formed of the bright leaves of the Virginia creeper, surrounds the Venetian looking-glass above his dressing-table. These little festal adornments, and still more the laughter and merriment of its inmates, give quite a new character to the grim old house. Teresina feels no longer afraid of the sound of her own voice, but goes about singing snatches of wild Italian airs as blithely as a lark.

Her guardian seems marvellously cheered and invigorated by their visitor's presence, and is ever ready to act *cicerone* to him, pointing out the special beauties of the cathedral; Leonardo da Vinci's masterpiece, or the church of San Ambrogio, or the treasures of the library bearing that holy bishop's name, where are the exquisite Dante window and Thorwaldsen's bas-reliefs. Colonel Corbin feels well enough to enjoy it all; his long rest at Brandon Court, and the bracing yatching expeditions, have done him lasting good. So that with the exception of a few additional silver threads near his temples, the picture-dealer thinks him looking younger and stronger than when they first met. For six weeks the owner of Casa Loretti will not hear of his quitting its roof; nor does it need much pressing to make him stay. At length discretion bids him tear himself away; and therefore, after faithfully promising to report himself when retracing his steps towards England, and with many injunctions from both Teresina and the *signore* as to what pictures and churches to visit, he sets off for Florence and Rome.

In former days, and even at the beginning of his visit to Milan, he had always taken delight in looking for points of resemblance, both in person and character, between Teresina and her mother. Of late, somehow, he has got out of the habit. Without unfaithfully drawing comparisons between the inspirer of his boyish passion and this young girl, he begins to feel attracted by charms exclusively belonging to the latter; these are high mental culture, a power of seizing upon special points of beauty in art or nature,

the gift of giving a sensible opinion on subjects of general interest, with not only modesty, but conciseness. Then, to crown all, an ever-ready sympathy in the pleasure or pain of others, and self forgetfulness for their sake, coupled with the most thorough simplicity and light-heartedness. All these qualities, though thoroughly apparent to Colonel Corbin, are, I think, summed up in his own mind under the heading of "lovable;" but whether merely as a much-valued young friend, or as something nearer and dearer has not yet suggested itself to him.

"My little girl is quiet this evening," said Signor Loretti some hours after Colonel Corbin's departure. "What ails thee, little one?"

"I don't know, Amico; unless it be that there seems a strange emptiness about the house."

CHAPTER IX.

BETWEEN FLORENCE AND BOLOGNA.

"TUNNELS, tunnels, tunnels! when will they come to an end, and give one a chance of seeing something of the country one is passing through?" Such are Colonel Corbin's thoughts as the train he is seated in speeds on its way from Florence to Bologna. He has been spending three months at Rome, and a week at Florence. The latter place is looking very bright and attractive in the fine spring weather; each afternoon seeing the Cascine filled more and more with a gay crowd of fashionable visitors taking their daily drive.

Milton has met many acquaintances in that favourite haunt of Americans, and is a little reluctant to tear himself away, not merely from the pictures and churches, but equally from pleasant meetings with those whom he had often greeted at his father's house in Fifth Avenue. Yet somehow, he scarcely knows why, his thoughts are constantly going back to Casa Loretti and hours spent amid its tapestry-hung walls with a grey-bearded man and blue-eyed maiden. A letter from his brother-in-law, which arrived two days ago, has helped him to make up his mind to return to England; but he is determined to stop a few days at Milan first, and has written to announce himself to the picture-dealer, which news has sent a thrill of delight through Teresina's heart as well as cheered her guardian, whose failing health had told upon his spirits.

Sir Ralph's letter is to say that a fine old family place is in the market, which he thinks would exactly suit Milton. The only subject of regret is, that it is not the Brandon side of the county, otherwise Claughton Hall seems in every way what his brother-in-law wants. Situated in one of the most beautiful parts of D——shire, well built, with good shooting, and near the ruins of a very beautiful abbey, which are sure to be a source of delight to him. The last owner, a regular scamp, has completely run through the heavily mortgaged estate, and now there is no member of the family in a position to buy it up. The only steady one, who, turning stock-broker, had made a fortune, was supposed to have had an eye to purchasing his old home, but died several years ago, and

no one knew what had become of his son, excepting that he had made some low marriage and went to live abroad, as his father would have nothing further to say to him. This news has given our hero a good deal to think about. Claughton Hall—a wealthy stockbroker who has quarrelled with his son: the expression "low marriage" jars on him. Milton feels convinced he could supply Sir Ralph with a good deal of information concerning the stockbroker's family. He wonders what became of all the old man's money: probably it was left away to other relations; yet it seems hard that Slaney's child should have none of it. This brings him to think of the future in store for Teresina. Her guardian has passed the three score years and ten allotted to man, and is growing very feeble. Soon the grave may close over him, and then what will become of his "little girl," as he still loves to call her? She has really no near friends, except one, but to that one she has already grown very very dear. "Come, come, what folly to indulge in such dreams. As if she would think twice of taking an old fellow like me!" and Milton, who was engaged in brushing his hair when Pat brought in the letter, gives a half-involuntary glance at the looking-glass before him.

Not such a very old-looking fellow, friend, despite of all you have gone through, and the thirty-eight years which have nearly passed over your head. No; a handsome soldierly man, for whom many a maiden's heart might beat rapidly. And the dignity of mature manhood is likely to be to your advantage in the eyes of her with whom you wish to find favour. Whether

the vision of himself reflected in the looking-glass, or the thought of being able to offer the home of her forefathers as a marriage gift to his future bride, gives him courage to determine to plead his suit, or whatever other combination of ideas effects this result, matters little; all we know is that a hasty farewell is bid to Florence and an early start made for Milan.

And now we find Colonel Corbin already some forty-five kilometres on his way northwards, fervently wishing the tunnels would cease, so that he may enjoy the view. Many another traveller has entertained similar desires on that line between Florence and Bologna, which is all too rich in such provoking interruptions. To Colonel Corbin they are specially unwelcome, because they shut out from his sight those fertile Tuscan plains which helped him to picture to himself how, with some one at his side to whom to point out the beauties of that far-off English home about which she had so often asked him questions, there might yet be a sweet earthly paradise in store for him in one of the pleasantest spots of England's most favoured county. Two Englishmen who got in at Pistoja are seated opposite Milton at the further end of the carriage. One is a carefully dressed man with fine broad shoulders and a long beard of scarcely natural blackness, to judge by the wrinkles in his face which no art can eradicate.

This individual is talking in a rather low voice to his somewhat younger-looking and decidedly shabbily dressed companion; but every now and then the noise of the train forces him to shout, as the man to whom he is speaking seems rather hard of hearing.

"I am very disappointed at not having been more successful; now that you, who have lived and travelled all over Italy for so many years, can give no clue, I begin to think it is really hopeless. I have an engagement which takes me back to London next week, and so suppose I must give it up."

"H'm," says the shabby man, musingly. "Have you tried Milan yet?"

"No, you see I came abroad with friends, and went straight to Rome from Marseilles and Genoa. I made what inquiries I could on the way, and intended doing the same on my way back."

"With about as much result as searching for a needle in a bundle of hay, as was to be expected," replied the shabby man, drily.

"You are right, I am afraid," said the first speaker, with a grim smile. "But why do you suggest Milan?"

"Because you say the young man talked of becoming a singer, and that is an excellent place for getting a musical education. You don't suppose any concert director or stage-manager would engage him till he had waded through books full of *solfeggios?*"

"No, I suppose not. Poor fellow! doubtless he came to grief. I wonder what became of his wife? She was a pretty creature. One could not be surprised at his heart gaining the victory over his reason. Well! time has showed old Claughton lived to repent his harshness."

The train is just leaving a tunnel, and the extra noise drowns the speaker's words.

"Who? What?" shouts the shabby man; "Claughton—old Claughton?"

The name attracts Milton's attention, who, without wishing it, has now and then overheard fragments of the conversation.

"Claughton—yes; he must have been a hard-hearted old rascal to shut the door on his only son, though it is not likely to affect him now, one way or the other. I should almost call it a just punishment that the will by which he hoped to make up for it seems not likely to be carried out."

Milton is fairly roused by this last speech, turns suddenly round, and almost before he is aware of what he is doing, raises his hat with characteristic politeness, and says:

'Gentlemen, if you will not deem it an impertinence, may I ask who this Mr. Claughton is of whom you are speaking?"

"May I ask, sir, the reason of this question?" inquires the dark-bearded man, drawing himself up.

"The reason is, sir, that I knew a Mr. Slaney Claughton who married against his father's wish, and indeed I was partly instrumental in proving, some years ago, that he and his father-in-law had met with their death in a very sad way."

"Their death, do you say? Poor fellow—poor Slaney! And his wife, do you know where she is?"

"Also dead."

"H'm! then there is nothing to be done."

"They have left one daughter, who lives at Milan with her guardian, Signor Loretti."

"Loretti! I wonder if it can be the picture-dealer?

I met him once, years ago. He is a man, I believe, who has done endless good turns to struggling young artists," remarks the shabby man.

"The same, sir," says Milton; "as kind-hearted and benevolent a man as ever lived."

"By Jove! this is a discovery," exclaims the first speaker. "I shall be very much obliged to you for any further information you can give me, as well as this *signore's* address. Meanwhile, may I ask your name?"

"Milton Corbin, sir, from New York."

"Milton Corbin? Then I think we must have met before. But you were quite a lad, then. It was in London. I knew your father very well indeed, and very kindly and hospitably he received me at his house in Fifth Avenue. I am Colonel Percy Rutherford."

"Indeed! then we certainly did meet at a dinner-party in London. I remember, I had just arrived from Germany, and strange to say, you asked me if I had met poor Slaney Claughton at Heidelberg. I well remember how warmly my dear father spoke of you. It is now upwards of two years since the old home in Fifth Avenue was broken up," says Milton, with an involuntary sigh.

The sad tone they are uttered in interprets the full meaning of the words to Colonel Rutherford, and with considerate tact, he answers:

"I shall never forget the kind reception of my courteous host. We must shake hands, for the sake of 'auld lang syne.'"

Milton wrings Colonel Rutherford's hand most

heartily, and hereupon is introduced to his companion, Dr. David Mackintosh, a keen, clever Scotchman, devoted to architecture, who has spent the greater part of his life in Italy, delighting in the beauty of its churches. He and Colonel Rutherford were old acquaintances, and the latter had hoped he might possibly be able to help him in tracing Slaney Claughton, as he had a very large acquaintance amongst artists and musicians. For this purpose they had met by appointment at Pistoja, where Dr. Mackintosh had been visiting the Basilica of S. Andrea.

This unexpected meeting results in Milton deciding to spend the night with them at Bologna, as Colonel Rutherford, who has been laid up with fever in Rome, does not care to attempt a longer journey. This gives them an excellent opportunity of talking over the subject of the Claughtons, and the Colonel learns the details of Slaney's short married life, the birth of his daughter, his young wife's and his own premature death, as well as of Teresina's adoption by Loretti. On the other hand, he tells Milton of the stockbroker's sudden decease, leaving a will by which he left his whole fortune, amounting to over one hundred thousand pounds, the house in Harley Street, and a moor in Scotland, to his son, Slaney, absolutely. But if in the course of ten years no trace could be found of Slaney, or his wife or descendants, then the house and lands were to be sold, and the amount realised, together with all personal property, were to go to charitable institutions, a large sum being specially set apart to found an orphanage for the children of

destitute artists, Colonel Rutherford being sole executor. Till the moment of meeting Milton, all advertisements, inquiries and researches had been of no avail. This has been a subject of much vexation to the colonel, who had always had a great fancy for Slaney; but he winds up by saying:

"You see, the lad had a spice of his father's temperament and pride. I told old Claughton to the face that I blamed him for his pig-headedness in refusing to see his son, merely for not throwing over a thoroughly good amiable girl because she happened to be an artist's daughter, which did not fall in with the old man's ambitious views. And Slaney knew this; but though he let me be his marriage witness, he refused to confide anything about his plans to me, excepting to say that he should try to become a professional singer, as his voice was his best gift, and supposed Italy was the place to go to. If he succeeded so as to become really distinguished, he would let his friends know. Until then, or till his father chose to welcome him once more, he thought the less heard of him at home the better. That was all I knew. He never wrote to me; whether he ever did to his father I cannot say for certain. Yet from things Mrs. Claughton let drop, I fancy her husband put a foreign letter in the fire unread, which must have been from Slaney. She, poor woman, was far too much afraid of her Eustace to carry on a correspondence behind his back; nor do I believe Slaney, even for her sake, would have done it."

"I dare say you will be interested to see the letter written by my fellow countryman, Mr. Twirl, from

the place where Claughton and Mr. Hardwicke were lost, and containing the account given by Peter Klupsel, the guide. I have kept it by me, and as soon as my servant has unpacked my things, we'll get it out for you," said Milton.

When, late in the evening, Pat had placed the desk supposed to contain the desired letter before his master, the latter searches amongst several neat bundles of papers and letters, till he comes to a small packet bearing the date: Lugano, 186—. This he unties and looks carefully through. Not finding Twirl's letter, he unclasps a note-book to see if it can be stowed away in either of its pockets; but all it contains is a folded paper, on which a childish hand has scribbled something in pencil. Milton wonders for a moment what this can be, then unfolding it, sees it contains the once white petals of a daisy; and these are the words written on it: "Milton Washington Corbin—Teresina Loretti. *Si amano di cuore.*" A childish joke to which it were folly to attach any significance. Yet in his present mood the coincidence pleases Milton. The lake, the boat, the good-humoured nurse with an array of silver pins in her hair, the pretty child at her side, the swarthy bare-armed fisherman, the distant view of Porlezza, and the encircling chain of hills, the threatening sky; he sees everything as if in the most vivid picture. "*Si amano di cuore!*" Of himself it is certainly true. He has always loved her; yes, from the dark night when he anxiously carried his precious burden up the rugged path leading to Ruvigliano. Then it was the love of a chivalrous tender heart stirred with compassion; soon it became love for her

winning ways and sweet simplicity, though chiefly on account of being Elsie's child. Now it is love for herself, her own worth and noble beauty of character—the love stronger than death of mature manhood for a gentle, pure-minded, self-forgetful woman. Why not then accept this little incident as a good augury of success for the morrow?

Milton is free to make his choice when and where he lists. He brings a heart still fresh, despite his silvered hair, not one cankered, like many a far younger man's, by endless love affairs and flirtations; he brings an unsullied life, *sans peur et sans reproche;* and if we look at it in a material point of view, all that money can procure will be freely lavished on his young wife, to whom will be given to reign as mistress in her own ancestral home. What, as far as we can see, is wanting to complete their happiness, if only she will lend a willing ear to his pleading? Milton rouses himself from his pleasant reverie, and once more resumes his work, as the thought suddenly suggests itself to him that Colonel Rutherford is waiting all this while to see Mr. Twirl's letter, It is, however, not forthcoming, and Milton fancies it may be in Signor Loretti's hands, as the latter had asked for it some time back, and might not have returned it. With this information and supposition he rejoins Colonel Rutherford, whom he finds considerably shaken by the journey, and being tended in really quite a motherly fashion by Dr. Mackintosh.

"You need not think of moving for at least the next four days, Colonel," says the red-haired bony Scotchman, sounding his "r's" in the not unpleasant

fashion of those who live across the border; "you have no more strength than a wee bairn."

"That is cheerful news, when I am in a hurry to get on," replies Rutherford. "Well, Colonel Corbin, I hope you will try and manage to stay at Milan till I arrive? It would be so much nicer to find you there, in every way. We might return to England together, if you would not find it very slow travelling with such an old woman as that touch of fever has made of me."

Milton, who feels tolerably sure of being at least a week at Milan, replies that he certainly hopes to be there to greet the colonel, and that then they can finally arrange their plans. Meanwhile, he can at once ask the *signore* for Mr. Twirl's letter, and send it to Bologna. Dr. Mackintosh says he may perhaps see his friend safe to Milan.

The following day Colonel Corbin, with the faithful Pat, bids farewell to Bologna and starts, his heart alternating with hopes and fears, for Lombardy.

CHAPTER X.

CASA LORETTI.

COLONEL CORBIN reached Milan at about nine o'clock in the evening. He had telegraphed to the picture dealer, saying he should arrive a day later than he had first intended, but could not say for certain by which train. It was a beautiful moonlight night, and so tempting for a walk that he left Pat and the luggage

to be rattled across the uneven pavement in a hackney conveyance innocent of springs, and himself entered the Corso Vittorio Emanuele on foot.

To seek words to describe adequately the exquisite beauty and grandeur of the Milan cathedral were a difficult task. Still harder would it be to convey a notion to those who have not seen it, of how overwhelming the impression is to the traveller who gazes for the first time on the magnificent structure, when the moonbeams, triumphing over the inroads of Time, make the whole seem white and pure, as though the marble had scarcely left the sheltering mother earth.

Milton, with his intense love for the beautiful, was enraptured by the scene that met his eye on reaching the Piazza del Duomo. He had never before realised in the same degree the vastness of the work, as now, when the moonlight made each portion of the façade stand out in full relief.

All around was very still. Being Wednesday in holy week, the usual ceaseless traffic was hushed in some measure, whilst the good people hied them to their prayers, or joined the Church in keeping fast and vigil till Easter morn.

With feelings almost amounting to awe, Milton crossed the Piazza, leaving Via Torino and the fashionable quarter behind him, and passed on through a portion of the Corso di Porta Ticinese to where the moonlight streamed through those mighty Corinthian columns which mark the entrance to the church of San Lorenzo. Three figures stood beneath the shadow of these Time-defying monuments; one, a man well striken in years; the other, a slender maiden; the

third, a tall well-proportioned youth. The old man lent on the young girl's arm, and their companion, on whom the pleasant task devolved of carrying her shawl, now stood by her side.

Already at a little distance the sound of their voices engaged in friendly conversation reached Milton's ears; the maiden's gentle accents chiming in pleasantly with the young man's sonorous tones; and yet it all jarred strangely on Colonel Corbin, and made the wish take momentary possession of him to retrace his steps, stop Pat and the luggage, spend the night at an hotel, and then bid Milan a hurried farewell. But it was too late to escape; the three people had already come forward from under the shade of the pillar, and the old man, recognising him, exclaimed with delight:

"Ah! our dear friend has kept his word. It was to greet you, Colonel Corbin, we came forth this evening."

"I feel very grateful for your kindness, sir," replied our hero, in the deferential tone with which he never failed to address either men or women of advanced age; then he shook hands with Teresina, and was introduced to her companion, Signor Francesco Traversari. Upon this they all walked on to Casa Loretti; Colonel Corbin by the old man's side, Teresina and Signor Traversari a little ahead, conversing together in Italian.

"Francesco is almost as dear to me as if he were my own son; he is a young artist of great talent, of whom the world will hear some day," said Signor Loretti to Colonel Corbin, when they were alone together next morning.

Somehow this intelligence did not gratify the person

to whom it was addressed; still less did the following addition, which the old gentleman made a little later to this speech:

"Yes, Francesco is a good lad, kind-hearted and full of good qualities. On first coming to my house, some three years ago, he was rather wild; gay companions and foaming *asti* were what he liked best. But one must forgive young men; we have all had our day of such things," said the *signore*, smiling benevolently; "and through all this I watched for the genius which I knew to be there. I helped him as far as lay in my power, perhaps mostly for the sake of the art I love so dearly; and now he has grown steady, his pictures are beginning to attract notice, and I feel I shall not be disappointed. He has cost me much anxiety, but that has only made him dearer to me. Now I have but one wish; when it is fulfilled I shall die content."

"You must not talk of dying, sir," said Colonel Corbin, who was rather at a loss what to say, and not quite sure whether he would like to know or not what this one wish of the old man's was. "I hope to find the owner of Casa Loretti, and the dear old house itself, looking just the same for many a long year whenever I happen to come this way."

"Ah, it is very kind of you to speak thus, my dear friend. But there are many things, above all age and ever-increasing weakness, which say to me, 'Pietro, keep thyself ready; the Master will soon call thee hence,' and my answer is: 'I await His bidding.' Yet I would first like to see my little girl settled in a home of her own; and I believe the young people are of

the same mind. Nevertheless, it is best to leave the matter a little to themselves. All I have shall be theirs; though I am not as rich as many think me, my little girl shall not be quite portionless."

He said no more, for just then Teresina entered and exclaimed:

"Colonel Corbin, you must really stay over next week; then we will make Amico go with us to the Certosa di Pavia; he has always said he would go when you came. Of course this week there is nothing to be done."

"It sounds very tempting," was the courteous reply, "but I am afraid it is impossible. I have promised my brother-in-law to go back to D——shire on business, and must start Monday or Tuesday at latest."

To stay longer seemed impossible to him now, though perhaps scarcely for the reason he assigned. Had it not been for the sake of his old friend, he would gladly have curtailed the time of his sojourn still farther.

"Well, we must not tease you," answered Teresina, but feeling very disappointed. "Now I must go to the English service; good-bye, Colonel Corbin—*addio*, Amico."

She lingered a moment to impress a kiss on the old man's head, and, having received a caress in return, left the room, wondering a little that Colonel Corbin did not offer to accompany her, as he had done more than once during his former visit.

Neither the services nor the place where they were held were bright and attractive, like those at Lugano had been; but Teresina was very faithful in her de-

votion to the English Church, though ready to accompany Signor Loretti to the cathedral whenever he wished.

Returning home, her thoughts still full of the disappointment of losing Colonel Corbin so soon, she was met by Francesco, who had also been paying a short act of devotion at a neighbouring church, which he had taken care to time so as to meet the English congregation. But Francesco might have spared himself the trouble, for all the welcome Teresina bestowed on him. As their way lay in the same direction, she allowed him to walk at her side, but was far too preoccupied to give more than the vaguest monosyllabic replies to his efforts to make himself agreeable. At length he put the unfortunate question:

"Which day, *signorina*, do you think Signor Loretti will be persuaded to make the excursion to the Certosa?"

Upon this Teresina gave an impatient toss of her pretty head and answered:

"How can I tell? In his state of health it is impossible to make plans so long beforehand."

The words had hardly escaped her lips than the conviction came to her that she was for some reason very cross and selfish that morning; unkind, too, for Francesco, who worked hard at his easel, was looking forward to the expedition as people do to a well-earned holiday. However, she was not destined to have much time for self-reproach, for the next turning brought them face to face with Colonel Corbin. The latter, remarking an unwonted shade of annoyance on Teresina's countenance, attributed it to his sudden

appearance being inopportune; Francesco interpreted it correctly—he felt that it was *he* who was in the way. Why did this grey-haired American come to trouble his peace? Hitherto Teresina had always bid him welcome, but from the moment of Colonel Corbin's arrival there had been a change in her manner.

The two men accompanied Teresina back to Casa Loretti, each reluctant to depart and leave his rival in possession, yet wishing himself away.

During Teresina's absence from the house Colonel Corbin had told his old friend of his meeting with Colonel Rutherford, and the important communication made to him by the latter concerning the stockbroker's will. This was of course necessary; but Milton remained silent about his own plan regarding the old family place, which he had joyfully looked forward to imparting to Signor Loretti and Teresina. He was beginning to feel sorry he had written to Sir Ralph from Florence saying the proposal to buy Claughton Hall met with his thorough approval.

Signor Loretti was naturally much amazed at the news that his "little girl" had suddenly become so great an heiress.

"One hundred thousand pounds," he kept exclaiming, "and so much valuable property besides. The child is indeed well provided for now; but I fear she will be filled with ambition. Suitors will not be lacking once this becomes known. She can choose her husband amongst those whose veins are filled with the best blood Italy boasts. I would not very much like my Teresina to live in that far off northern climate; I love to think of her as a true child of the

sunny south. But Francesco, poor lad, will not dare to seek the wealthy English heiress in marriage; it was different when she was only the old picture-dealer's adopted child."

This view of matters proved a relief to Corbin. His own fortune, one of the largest in New York, made him above suspicion of mercenary motives in asking Teresina's hand, and perhaps Signor Loretti would deem it a more suitable match under present circumstances. Claughton Hall might yet have a mistress of the old stock again.

"Have you any reason, sir, to suppose that either Teresina or Signor Traversari entertain warmer feelings towards each other than those of friendship?" asked Milton gravely.

"That Francesco is attracted by my little girl is certain; how could it be otherwise? And such a handsome young man is sure to take a woman's fancy; therefore I make no doubt that Teresina would be willing to accept him. Added to that, she always obeys me," said the old man, as if it were a question of little more importance than arranging some excursion. "Still, she is fully young yet, though with a mind far beyond her years; therefore I do not care to hurry her into a marriage as long as my strength does not totally fail. She is so accustomed to the artists who live in the house visiting us frequently, that I do not think she attaches any meaning to Francesco's frequent visits. If a better suitor comes, I shall be well satisfied."

There was a pause. The *signore* finished his cigarette in silence, and Colonel Corbin knocked the ashes

carefully from his cigar, and leaning back in his chair, crossed and recrossed his feet several times, at the same time stroking his moustaches nervously. At length he said:

"Signor Loretti, as you do not seem to think Teresina's affections are very seriously engaged, I will tell you how matters stand with me. When still a lad, younger than Francesco, I fell passionately in love with a young girl very like Teresina in face, but not her equal in character and culture. This was Elsie Hardwicke; as you know, I had a successful rival in Slaney Claughton. I never cared for any other woman till I met with Teresina. She has taught me the difference between a youth's romantic passion and the quieter, yet really deeper, love of later years. In short, there is but one woman I care to make my wife, and she is your adopted daughter."

"You wish to marry my little girl?" inquired the old man, opening his eyes wide in astonishment.

"Yes, indeed; if you think she will have an old fellow like me."

"Nay, you do well enough, Colonel Corbin; but I will not flatter you—only I am surprised. That Francesco should be attracted by her pretty face is natural; it is the way of young men. But that you——"

"I, with my grey hairs, should be past such follies," interrupted Colonel Corbin, smiling, and with the little laugh he always had when feeling very shy; "but years don't always bring wisdom. And now, Signor Loretti, I want to ask if you have any objection to my proposing to Teresina. My circumstances you already know sufficiently for it to be needless to dwell

on them now; I will only say your darling could find no man who would love her more tenderly," he added, feelingly.

"Indeed, you do us a great honour," replied Signor Loretti, with ceremonious courtesy, "and have my full consent. I will send for Teresina as soon as she returns from church, and tell her of the arrangement."

This mode of settling matters did not suit Milton's American ideas, to which *mariages de convenance* were wholly foreign, so he smiled again, and said:

"I know it is customary on the Continent to arrange all such affairs without consulting the young lady concerned; but it is not usual with us, nor yet in England; I therefore beg you not to say a word on the subject to Teresina till I have myself asked her consent and told you that I have gained it."

The old man shrugged his shoulders at this novel way of doing things, then said good-naturedly:

"As you will. I promise not to speak to my little girl on the subject till you wish it."

Colonel Corbin replied:

"Thank you. Then I will try my luck as soon as a suitable opportunity offers, and will now go and meet Teresina."

The unsatisfactory character of that meeting has been already described. It was out of the question to propose then, and again, as on the previous night, Milton wished he had not come. Still he hesitated; years ago things might have been different, if he could have remained to follow up the advantage gained, instead of being obliged to start suddenly for Paris. Bitter as the blow had been, and blank the years that

followed, he would not now have had it otherwise; only he must bear that early experience in mind, and let no impetuous feelings, inconsistent with the greater measure of philosophy years are supposed to bring, lead him to take some hasty step, and thus ruin all. No; he must wait at least a few days, and assure himself whether this handsome, fiery-eyed Italian had indeed forestalled him, and taken Teresina's heart by storm. Yes, he would wait still; yet all the while his heart was beating with a rapidity scarcely to be called philosophic. Could it be otherwise? The next week would decide his fate, and the fair hand which held the thread of his life's happiness might prove capable of breaking it with as little compunction as those direful sisters in ancient story were supposed to show in cutting short the lives of the earth's inhabitants.

As Colonel Corbin had expected, Signor Loretti produced Mr. Twirl's letter from his desk, and it was at once despatched to Percy Rutherford. By return of post came a note from Dr. Mackintosh to announce its receipt, and say that his friend was not yet well enough to think of moving.

CHAPTER XI.

WAITING.

THE little party at Casa Loretti spent the greater part of Good Friday in the cathedral, where a multitude of people were assembled for the solemn service of the

Seven Words, and little bands of earnest worshippers repeated penitential litanies at the several side-altars.

Francesco Traversari alone was missing. He had a widowed bedridden mother, to whom he was fondly attached, and it was a long-standing promise that he should spend Good Friday at her house at Monza. It cost him a good deal, under present circumstances, to keep his word, but he was far too good a son to think of breaking it.

It is not to be wondered at that Colonel Corbin should feel gratified at the existence of the old lady and her boy's filial piety.

Teresina had of course been duly informed of her sudden accession of fortune; but in her simple-mindedness scarcely realised what it was to be a great heiress, nor how desirable in the eyes of many people. She was well content to be just Amico's "little girl;" any other state of things seemed unnatural to her. If riches made it a duty to go away and take possession of property far from her old friend, they did not seem desirable to her at all. As a little child, she loved to hear her father talk of the beauties of his native land, and had hoped some day to wander with him amongst its beautiful parks and peaceful meadows; but now he and her grandfather were gone to their rest, she had ceased to think of any other place as home besides the old house at Milan.

Further, it must be owned that her thoughts were very much pre-occupied at the time the terms of her paternal grandfather's will were made known to her. Colonel Corbin's return, to which she had looked forward with such pleasure, had somehow proved a dis-

appointment. The long talks and friendly intercourse, which had made his first visit so delightful, were lacking now. Though kind and polite—to be otherwise would have been foreign to his nature—there was a certain restraint in his manner, which Teresina perceived only too soon, to her intense regret.

Despite his idolising love for his little girl, Signor Loretti had been blind—if such things did not happen every day, we should say strangely blind—to what was going on in her heart. When she told him, after Colonel Corbin had left for Rome, that the house seemed empty; it was still true that she was not fully aware of what made it so; but that night, while the tears bedewed her pillow, the thought came to her yet more strongly, what a difference it would make to have no guest for whom to deck the table with flowers; no one good-naturedly to point out the mistakes she sometimes made in English; no one to laugh at in return for the marvellous Italian phrases which made old Margherita throw up her hands and exclaim: "*Santa Vergine!*"—in short, no Milton Corbin.

For all this, the young girl was too humble-minded to suppose for one moment that kind, wise friend, who had been her childhood's delight, could ever take any interest in her but for the sake of old times; and after a day or two spent in regrets, she contented herself with looking forward to his promised return, and praying heartily, as heretofore, for him in her daily petitions.

When Francesco Traversari returned to his winter quarters, she received him with the usual frank and friendly welcome. In short, all things remained much

as usual till Colonel Corbin came once more to stay at Casa Loretti. Then only the young girl began to feel that the anxiously-looked-for pleasure was somehow not all she had anticipated, and that Francesco's society was becoming very wearisome.

Alas for poor Traversari! two people were made very happy by his absence from Milan on Good Friday. To complete his discomfort, he found his mother full of the idea that he should propose to a rich cousin, Maria Gentilini; a good, amiable creature, but neither graceful nor pretty.

The weather was very pleasant at Milan then; mild, yet not too warm. On Good Friday evening Signor Loretti, fatigued by the various services of the day, had fallen asleep in his chair; Colonel Corbin was seated on the *loggia* puffing at a cigarette, and near him sat Teresina, gazing out into the moonlit street, and indulging in that *dolce far niente*, the delights of which her Italian education had taught her.

Suddenly rousing herself from her reverie, she turned to Colonel Corbin and asked:

"How did you like our cathedral services to-day?"

The question was put almost with an air of proprietorship; the grand old church was very dear to her, hallowed by many childish memories. She had loved it from the time when her little feet had found it an effort to keep up with Lucia, and the latter used to point out to her the statue of the Madonna in the temple as a pattern of children worshipping, and told how the imposing-looking man in red coat and cocked hat was there to see that people behaved quietly and reverently in God's house.

"The music was simply divine," said Colonel Corbin, in answer to Teresina's question; "that I always like; and I loved to see those groups of country people praying together so heartily, for what I generally miss in the Roman worship is unity. One reads his private manual of devotions; another kneels to say a short prayer or tell his beads, and soon rises to make room for a third; whilst many simply look on whilst the priest celebrates. I always think nothing can come up to our own Church service; the hearty responses of the people convey so thoroughly the idea of priest and people being members of one body, and that all mere individuality should be made subservient to that nobler feeling when we meet for public worship."

"Ah! yes; it is indeed beautiful!" exclaimed Teresina enthusiastically. "How dearly I should love to be able to see our service rendered as you tell me it is in many churches in England and America! But I am not likely to do this," she added with a little sigh.

"And why not, Teresina? You used to love to talk of England and English things; have you lost all interest in them, and become a thorough Italian, heart and soul?" asked Colonel Corbin, rather sadly.

"You know Amico likes best to think of me as one," answered Teresina, a little pettishly.

Somehow Colonel Corbin's question vexed her; formerly he had never talked to her like this, but taken for granted that she always loved to hear about *all* that was English—people, scenery, churches, country life, even fogs, which she went so far as to declare must be an improvement on everlastingly

blue skies. She, for her part, had been always ready to listen to him and put endless questions.

Had she but known how Colonel Corbin hung on her words, she might have answered differently ; as it was, he also felt disappointed, and said almost bitterly:

" Why not be frank as usual, Teresina, and say you yourself love best to be Italian ?"

How Teresina would have replied, or whether she would vouchsafe an answer at all, remained a mystery, for Signor Loretti, awaking just then from his slumbers, called Colonel Corbin to his side. All day long the old man had found it hard to keep his promise of silence towards Teresina, and had allowed himself to drop off to sleep in happy confidence that the *tête-à-tête* in the *loggia* would bring matters to a happy ending and permit his lips to be unsealed.

" May I congratulate you ?" he asked, as Milton approached his chair.

" It is for me to congratulate you," was the grave reply, " on your ward's strong Italian sympathies."

Something in Colonel Corbin's manner banished the possibility of any further questioning, but the old man could not suppress a perplexed shake of the head and inquiring :

" *Che, che ?*"

Poor Milton ! the diffidence which clung to him all his life was causing him much trouble ; all his seeming jealousy was a doubt whether Teresina could possibly prefer him to his younger and, as he thought, more attractive rival. Hardly had he uttered his severe answer to his old friend's congratulations, when he began to repent of having taken Teresina's remarks so

seriously; therefore he changed the conversation at once, and tried to make himself as agreeable as possible, conversing about the delights of Rome and Florence. He was rewarded by Teresina drawing up her chair, proving an eager listener, and ere long smiling as brightly as of old.

CHAPTER XII.

CROSS PURPOSES.

On Easter Eve Francesco Traversari returned to Milan, glad to have rejoiced his old mother's heart and accomplished his visit, still more pleased to get back to Casa Loretti and be able to watch his rival.

Signora Traversari had praised his cousin Maria till he devoutly wished never to hear of her again, and went back to Milan with the firm determination to put all etiquette aside and inquire of Teresina at the earliest opportunity what his chances were.

On reaching Casa Loretti, Francesco met old Margherita toiling up the staircase, weighed down by a basket of provisions, with which she was going to prepare a festal dinner for the morrow.

Francesco took the load gaily from the old woman, saying:

"I dare say I shall help to eat some of those good things, Margherita, and therefore it is fair that I should have part of the labour."

He was a great favourite with the old woman, who, though very fond of Colonel Corbin, shared in her master's jealousy of foreigners; only that in her case

ignorance vastly increased the prejudice. Added to his being a fellow-countryman, Francesco's invariable easy good-nature, and a certain show of respect to which he always treated the good soul, had enlisted her sympathies on his behalf. Her keen eyes had soon discovered what tender glances he cast at Teresina, and she had long made up her mind that they should marry some day. It had likewise not escaped her notice that his prospects of success had not seemed so good of late; she now thought the moment come when she might do her favourite a good turn.

"It is like your kind self to help an old woman, Signor Francesco. The Madonna reward you for it, and give you some one to care for you when no longer young!" she said.

"*Ohimé*, I do not know who there is who will do that for an old bachelor, Margherita *mia*."

"Old bachelor, indeed! There is no likelihood of a fine young gentleman like you being that, Signor Francesco. I think I could tell of a pretty mouth that would not say no, if you put a certain question to its owner," and the old woman nodded her grey head as if much knowledge lay hidden behind her wrinkled brow. "One must have courage, Signor Francesco. Faint heart never won fair lady"—again she shook her head significantly.

"How is Signor Loretti?" inquired Francesco, thinking it time to change the subject.

"The good master was very tired last night; he has grown very feeble of late. I sometimes think he may not be with us much longer; however, the good Lord be praised! he seemed brighter to-day, and went out

some time since to walk with the *signore Americano.* I don't fancy they will stay out much longer. Why don't you come in and wait for them? The Signorina Teresina is at home, and will be glad to entertain you till their return."

"Perhaps I may come in—presently," answered Francesco, with seeming carelessness, though secretly rejoicing at the news; "but now I must go and put down my travelling-bag."

Hereupon he left the old woman at the threshold of her kitchen, and hurried up to his own little room in the attic. On reaching this he threw open the window and gazed up and down the street to see if either Colonel Corbin or Signor Loretti were anywhere visible. But strain his eyes as he would, he could discover no trace of them in the fast waning light. Before drawing back his head, he cast a glance at the picture-dealer's *loggia,* which lay directly beneath his window. A girlish figure was leaning over the stone balustrade, a lonely looking little figure, with her head buried in her hands. To Francesco at least she seemed lonely and sad; yet this idea rather gave him satisfaction, as he privately wondered what the cause of this grief might be, and whether he could in any wise serve as a comforter to the forlorn maiden. The result of his cogitations was that he descended the stairs, and soon found himself in Signor Loretti's drawing-room. A few seconds more and he stepped out on to the *loggia.*

Teresina had been feeling very much out of spirits all that day. Colonel Corbin had expressed his determination to leave for England on the Monday, and this had caused her to shed many secret tears. She

could not make him out; he was certainly in a very strange mood since his return. Sometimes he talked as pleasantly as of old; then on Good Friday night he had displayed a *brusquerie* which had hitherto been foreign to him. Perhaps she bored him; after all, a foolish little girl like herself could be no companion for a man like Colonel Corbin, who was so wise and good, had travelled so far, and seen so much. That must be it. Well, he should not be bored by her any longer, thought the brave, foolish little heart, stoutly resolving to give him as little of her society as courtesy would permit. These thoughts led to her pleading fatigue as an excuse for not joining her guardian and his guest in their walk; yet when they had left the house, and even old Margherita had gone out, a feeling of desolation crept over her. Going out on to the *loggia*, she hid her face in her hands. Almost ere she was aware of it herself, her palms were bedewed with tears. Francesco had indeed not chosen a fortunate moment for learning his fate.

Teresina was far too absorbed in her perplexities to notice that anyone was there till she felt a hand placed on each of her shoulders, and heard a rich, melodious voice inquire in Italian:

"My life, my little one, what grieves thee?"

Then she started up angrily, and exclaimed:

"Signor Traversari, how dare you?"

"Dare—how dare I, Teresina *mia?* Who but I should dare to offer thee comfort? Not that grey-headed American, with his stiff, formal ways. Nay, nay, my darling, he shall not have thee. I will work, slave for thee; do all I can to make thee happy; but

mine thou must be; ill shall it fare the man who would snatch thee from me."

He had seized her hand in his eagerness, drawing her closely towards him, grasping it so passionately that she was unable for a moment to free herself. It was only for a brief space, but during it the drawing-room door had opened and shut; a man had entered and retreated again. And what had the rising moon revealed to him? A picture of real life, at which an artist might have rejoiced, as offering an admirable study for his brush; but at sight of which the beholder's heart was wrung to the very depth with anguish. And this was the picture he saw, or thought he saw, framed by the stonework of the open window: the figure of a stalwart youth drawing a gentle maiden towards him in the first passionate outburst of joy at finding himself an accepted lover.

A few minutes later Signor Loretti came in, preceded by old Margherita bearing a tray with some curiously-wrought candlesticks, of which the old man was very proud. To him there was nothing strange in finding his ward and the young artist Traversari together.

"Amico," exclaimed Teresina, going to meet him, "here is Signor Francesco;" then she followed Margherita out of the room.

It did not escape Signor Loretti that Francesco was in a melancholy mood and in a great hurry to bid good night. Colonel Corbin also seemed very preoccupied at supper, and announced his full determination to start early on the following Monday for England. In the morning he had been very bright, and full of the plan of returning to Milan the following autumn.

CHAPTER XIII.

EASTER DAY.

"It would have given me much pleasure to have gone with you and my little girl to assist at High Mass," said Signor Loretti on Easter morning; "but old age is beginning to assert its rights with me, and making my early communion was already a great fatigue. But I could not forgive myself if either of you were to stay at home on my account; therefore I beg you to go with Teresina."

The old man's face did indeed look worn and pinched, and there was a drawn look about his mouth. Colonel Corbin had watched him closely of late, and was grieved at his daily increasing infirmity, often wondering rather sadly how soon the old grey house would know its genial owner no more, and whether he himself would ever again be greeted by this kind and courteous friend.

Such thoughts as these led Milton, gentle and considerate as it was ever his wont to be, to redouble his attentions to Signor Loretti, ever seeking to anticipate his wishes. On the present occasion the simple request about the cathedral was not easy to grant; yet knowing his old friend would fret, and imagine they stayed away on his account, he said cheerfully:

"It is very good of you to wish us to go—just like your kind self; you know how thoroughly I enjoy good singing. I love fine church music especially."

Teresina entered the drawing-room at that moment, and was told of the arrangement. She was not aware

of what Colonel Corbin had seen on the previous evening, nor of how he had interpreted it, and being also anxious to please her guardian, agreed at once to the arrangement. Nothing further was said on the subject, but in half-an-hour's time Colonel Corbin and Teresina left the house together on their way to the cathedral; both were stiff and silent, each feeling utterly miserable.

In the course of the morning Signor Loretti sent old Margherita to invite Signor Traversari to dinner; he received as answer that the young artist had left the house at an early hour, travelling-bag in hand, and had probably gone back to Monza.

Beautiful music; men's voices chanting as a procession moved round the interior of the building; clouds of incense wafted from the censers of the acolytes; rainbow streaks of light falling through the stained-glass windows, here illumining a gorgeous vestment, there lighting on the black lace veil wrapped round the kneeling form of some Milanese lady, or the pure white folds of a sister of mercy's head-gear; and then a sense of intense, aching loneliness, despite all that dense throng—such was the confused impression conveyed to Milton's sight and mind during the first part of that Easter service. The solemn function continued; powerfully and appealingly rose the notes of the swelling organ; the kneeling crowd had bowed their heads in adoration; and now, sweetly, softly, comfortingly, the cry went up:

"*Agnus Dei quis tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis. Agnus Dei quis tollis peccata mundi, dona nobis pacem.*"

Colonel Corbin had often frequented the services of the Church of Rome, not from any leaning towards Roman Catholicism, but because he loved the music. On these occasions he always behaved with reverent attention, being too much of a gentleman to follow the bad example of some travellers, who, though they would be the first to resent such behaviour in their own places of worship, look about them, whisper, in short, "behave themselves unseemly," at the highest religious services of the countries they are visiting.

"*Dona nobis pacem*"—that prayer, ever needed by that portion of the universal Church still militant here below, and which in hours of bitter anguish has been wrung alike from the soul's depth of God's noblest saints, as well as of earth's meanest sinners, found an echo in Milton Corbin's heart that Easter-day, touching it in a way no other chant, however glorious, was able to do. The very breathing forth of the petition brought balm to his embittered feelings, peace to his troubled heart; it seemed to him as if a loving voice spoke in answer: "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest."

The mass ended, he rose to his feet, feeling strengthened and refreshed; Teresina was still kneeling in wrapt devotion; when at length she raised her head, he was surprised to see in her face a look, rather of chastened resignation, than the joyousness to be expected in the countenance of a newly-betrothed offering her meed of praise and thanksgiving.

Silently the weather-beaten hero and tender maiden retraced their steps from the cathedral to Casa Loretti. The rest of the day passed sadly for all. Signor Loretti felt very feeble, and spoke but little; Teresina

appeared absent; Colonel Corbin sat on the *loggia* smoking, in silence. Towards evening, finding himself alone with his old friend, he said, very briefly, that he had observed enough to convince him Teresina reciprocated Signor Traversari's feelings, and it would be most ill-timed to make her another offer. Milton further added, having that day received a letter from his brother-in-law announcing the purchase of Claughton Hall, he desired to restore it to the last of the old stock on her marriage; he should not care to live there himself, as a bachelor. Cutting short his old friend's remonstrances, he said a brief farewell, and started next morning, at daybreak, for England, attended by honest Pat.

CHAPTER XIV.

CONCLUSION.

'TERESINA *mia*, an accident, a terrible accident, has occurred!" said the old *signore*, the third morning after Colonel Corbin's departure, pushing his spectacles up on to his forehead, and leaning back in his chair with an air of profound dismay. "It happened to the express train for Turin, near the village of V——. A truck, left behind by some workmen, caused the engine to run off the line; several persons were killed, and many seriously wounded."

Meanwhile, Teresina, though bravely trying to master her agitation, was standing, pale as death, beside her guardian, whilst he gave out the news from the morning

paper, divided between alarm and pleasurable excitement.

"When—when was it, Amico?"

"On Monday, child; the early train. . . . *Gran Dio!* our dear friend must have been in it."

"Is there no list—of—of the wounded, Amico?" This time no effort could master the quaver in Teresina's voice.

"No; stay—yes, here, child," said the old man, running his trembling finger along the lines of print. "'Killed—Il Conte di X——, Signor Gregorio Mantovini, passengers; Giacomo Neri, engine-driver; Carlo Resegone, stoker. A second-class passenger was unidentified.' At least he lives, Teresina *mia!*"

"God be praised, Amico!"

"Amen!" replied Signor Loretti, reverently. "Now let me see the account of the wounded. Ah, here it is. Sixteen in all." The aged finger trembles yet more, as the old man reads: "'A gallant stranger, who was most active in helping to rescue the helpless and wounded, is likely, we fear, to pay dearly for his bravery. Whilst seeking to extricate an aged peasant woman from beneath the *débris* of a third-class carriage, he was struck on the head by a piece of iron-work, and had not yet recovered consciousness when this went to the press, though removed, with the other wounded, to the neighbouring hamlet of V——. His passport describes him as Colonel Milton Washington Corbin, of the United States army; aforesaid document makes mention of a servant, Patrick O'Brien; the latter is missing.'"

It was with difficulty that Signor Loretti could command himself sufficiently to read to the end of the

paragraph; nor could Teresina's utmost efforts to be brave keep back her tears.

Two arms clasped round his neck; a young head laid on his shoulder; a little heart-broken sob—such was the answer the old man received when, having finished reading the newspaper account, he remarked in a faltering voice:

"My little girl, our dear friend lies wounded—perhaps worse—alone, amongst strangers."

Surprised at Teresina's sudden loss of all self-control, he turned his head, then gently but firmly unclasping the small white hands from around his neck, drew his little girl to him; the look of unspeakable anguish she could not hide revealed to him how blind he had been throughout. No words could have equalled its silent eloquence.

"Teresina, my darling child, we must go to him."

"Yes, Amico."

A long, loving embrace, and then, after a few moments, Teresina had sufficiently recovered herself to run off and consult Margherita about preparing for the journey. It was not many kilometres off, but Colonel Corbin would probably not be in a fit state to be moved; once that was possible, he must of course be brought to Casa Loretti. Meanwhile Margherita, who was an excellent nurse, must accompany her master, and take with her all things necessary for his comfort as well as the patient's. All must be ready for the next train, which left in little more than an hour, and the family physician, Dr. Fabrini, sent for to accompany them if possible.

Teresina thought of all these small details, and

made the arrangements calmly and quietly, though all the while her heart beat wildly with alternate sorrow and hope. He whom she loved so deeply and truly, though she would never have let him know it whilst he was in health and needed her not, now lay wounded and alone amongst strangers—it might be dying—perhaps they would arrive too late. And now she must go with her guardian, who would not move without her; nor could she have stayed away, and yet she scarcely knew what good she could do by going. She envied old Margherita, whose knowledge of nursing would make her in constant attendance on the patient. Luckily for Teresina, as she could bring her thoughts to no satisfactory conclusion, there was but little time to ponder.

The hour for starting found Signor Loretti, Teresina and old Margherita at the station, where they were met by a somewhat pompous little man with a kindly twinkle in his dark eyes, a very large straw hat, white linen suit, and huge unbleached sunshade lined with green.

"Very glad I happened to be at home when your message reached my house, *signorina*. I have many cases on hand, but can just manage to run down with you to V——, and return by the next train. I can return to-morrow, you know, if necessary."

Teresina was not sorry when the noise of the train proved sufficient excuse for her to take no share in the conversation, and she could gradually shrink into a corner and gaze out of the window, apparently absorbed in the contemplation of the numerous rice-

fields, which presented a rather dreary spectacle at that season.

From the V—— station-master the travellers learnt that the foreign *signore* had been carried on the day of the accident to a neighbouring house, and some hours later he was reported still living. This was all they could hear.

With beating hearts the little party followed a ragged urchin who volunteered to be their guide; a long walk along a dusty highway brought them to a solitary white house, which a not very skilful artist had adorned with sundry frescoes representing a rustic courtship, in which a very yellow moon and strangely-fashioned guitar played a prominent part.

A smiling, poorly-clad peasant-woman stood in the doorway, bright-complexioned, brown-eyed, and with rosy lips, which in parting to smile a gracious welcome displayed a row of pearly white teeth. She invited the *signori* into her humble dwelling with that grandly-simple courtesy which is part of the Italian nature.

"Yes, the Holy Virgin be praised, the handsome, brave *signore* still lived. It was her cousin Carlotta whom he had ventured his life to save. And it had been sad, so sad to look at his blanched cheek, his wounded temple, and see him lying there still, and seemingly lifeless. The *signor medico* from the neighbouring hamlet had done his best; but the case appeared difficult to deal with, and he had but little hope if his latest remedies did not bring relief. The fever was so high, and the poor *signore* talked wildly in a strange language. Only once or twice she had understood when he cried piteously, "Teresina, Tere-

sina!" and then, when no one came, sank back in his pillows with a look of disappointment. Such was the peasant woman's tale, told gently, simply, sorrowfully; the little group of listeners were deeply moved. Tears rained down old Margherita's withered cheeks, as she wrung her hands again and again, exclaiming:

"*Povero signore, povero signore! O Gran Dio, abbia pieta di lui, pieta di noi tutti!*" ("Poor gentleman, poor gentleman! Oh, great God, have pity on him, pity on us all!")

Teresina's eyes are turned away; let us respect her feelings, nor scan them with too curious scrutiny; enough that loving hearts are round her, though they show their sympathy by leaving her in peace, and that her old guardian presses her hand in a gentle, fatherly way which best tells his tender pity.

Even the garrulous doctor is silenced, and only betrays his emotion by beating a tattoo on the brim of his hat: a way he has when deeply moved.

It is best for us to rest content with this assurance, nor weary the reader with doctors' and nurses' reports. Suffice it to say that the remedies which had already been used, supplemented by Dr. Fabrini's advice, and Margherita's faithful nursing, did their work effectually. In short, that Colonel Corbin lived. He lived, but there came anxious days and weary nights when hope seemed almost gone for the watchers ere the longed-for "out-of-danger" was pronounced. Yet at length that moment came; and by-and-by came a still happier day, the most joyous Teresina had ever known, when Amico led her into his wounded friend's presence and said:

"I bring you my little girl;" then quietly withdrew, leaving the two together to tell the secret of their deep mutual love, and explain each other's perplexities.

"And can my darling be content with such a shattered, grey-haired old soldier?" asked Milton lovingly,

"Yes, if only he can be satisfied with such a foolish little girl," was the lovingly-whispered reply.

* * * * * *

Would it not be best to follow Signor Loretti's example, and leave them thus alone with their great happiness? I should be well content to do so, but for the benefit of any who may think otherwise, will add a few more details concerning my hero and heroine, and some of the other characters in my story.

The move back to Casa Loretti was effected ere long, and after some peaceful, restful weeks spent there, Colonel Corbin had gained sufficient strength to go with Teresina and Loretti to their favourite Lugano, where he gradually became completely restored to health. It was settled that the wedding should take place in the following autumn; Signor Loretti was anxious to see his "little girl" married, as his ever-increasing infirmity warned him more and more frequently that his summons to depart was at hand.

Shortly after Colonel Corbin had been moved back to Casa Loretti, Colonel Rutherford arrived at Milan, and Signor Loretti insisted on his becoming his guest. Life and joyousness returned for a season to the old grey house, and peals of laughter often echoed through

its walls. Then, too, all necessary business concerning Teresina's inheritance was transacted.

* * * * * *

Only one more person of any importance in my story remains to be mentioned—it is Mr. Obadiah Twirl. The last news of him came from Baroness von Golten, who still continues to frequent foreign watering-places, unchanged in appearance and vivacity. She had met Mr. Twirl a year or two before at Mentone, when he announced his intention of sailing from Genoa to New York in a vessel freighted with lemons, and he calc'lated he would have "an elegant time."

THE END.

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